

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823

St 835 pa

v. 2

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.


To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

DEC 9 1984

DEC 12 1984

MAR 28 2005



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

A Novel.

BY

HESBA STRETTON,

AUTHOR OF "THE CLIVES OF BURCOT."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON

CHARLES W. WOOD,
13, TAVISTOCK STREET, STRAND.

1867.

[*All Rights reserved.*]

LONDON :
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS, WHITEFRIARS.

823

St 835 pa

v. 2

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE John Aspen had been dead three months, there was a newer, stronger, more energetic life rushing like a tide through the ancient walls of Monkmoor. Harriet was no easy, good woman, who could be content with the indolent seclusion to which Emma had querulously resigned herself under the roof of her poetic mother-in-law. She required gaiety, diversion, or as she chose to call it, society ; and with consummate skill she contrived to surround herself apparently against her will, with all the old friends about Thornbury, from whom she had been separated so many years. That they should rally round her was no great surprise to Mrs. Aspen ; and she gave

full credit to the protestations of both Harriet and Emma that their visits were distasteful, but utterly unavoidable. Richard Crofton was also walking in John's shoes about the Priory farmstead; but he was by no means satisfied with the slow and old-fashioned pace of the late master. He was an enthusiastic amateur in agriculture, and Paul was only too glad to lay down his brief authority in the management of Mrs. Aspen's affairs. Never before had Richard Crofton so nearly approached the height of his ambition, the position of a landed proprietor; and the agricultural instinct, which seems more or less inherent in the breast of every Englishman, developed largely in his. Nothing could surpass his zeal in planning and introducing improvements upon the farm; and his enthusiasm was so genuine that Mrs. Aspen, in her retreat at the Vicarage, was fired with a new love of rural pursuits, and gave him unconditional permission to try what experiments he thought proper. The pastoral spirit

was so congenial to her ; the Croftons mingled with their schemes so many poetic customs, which they had seen observed in the vineyards of southern France, and the mountain farms of Switzerland ; that she yielded a cheerful consent to any plan sufficiently picturesque.

Unconsciously to herself Doris was pitted against Harriet Crofton in an unequal contest. A good woman can never make herself as attractive and fascinating as an unscrupulous one. She has too much compunction ; her heart pricks her too remorsefully ; her conscience burns before she can be guilty of an enchanting fault. A thousand airy and womanly scruples surround her, and bind delicate fetters upon her conduct, which she cannot break through if she would. Had Doris been gravely informed of the unworthy rivalry existing between herself and Mrs. Crofton, she would at once have quitted the arena, and not by word or glance sought to win Paul from the perilous charms of his old

love. Many a woman retires heart-sick from a conflict in which even to conquer would be a disgrace. But many a woman loses because she relies simply upon her own sterling worth, and disdains to borrow a lesson in tactics from her worthless rival. It is hardly possible for men to love virtue alone. "We would rather," says Hazlitt, "talk with a beautiful woman than an ugly one." Not that our Doris was ugly : far from it ; or the painting which hung over Paul's hearth would not have possessed the secret and innocent charm, which caused him many a time to turn away from the steadfast gaze of its reproachful eyes, with a sigh upon his lips, and an undefined misgiving at his heart. But Doris was ailing ; and being a veritable woman, she lost a good deal by the failure of her health and spirits. The dark lines deepening under her eyes, and the pallor of her cheeks passing into the wan hue of illness, were by no means as attractive as Harriet's blooming face, and the brilliancy of her colour and smile. Besides, Doris was to

be blamed, if, as a sagacious woman, she had any perception of Harriet's design. She would not wield a single weapon against her. As if she felt an ever-increasing chagrin against Paul; or as if the words he had overheard her utter to Mrs. Atcherley were rankling in her mind, and she must take every method to convince him of their falsity, she became more distant and frigid to him every day, to the inexpressible grief of Mrs. Aspen. If Doris had really loved Paul, and been jealous of Harriet Crofton, she could not have been more difficult to propitiate.

Paul was not very far wrong when he said he must have made a great fool of himself if Thornbury had not yet forgotten how Harriet Crofton jilted him twelve years ago. He had been as great a fool as any warm-hearted and passionate young lover of five-and-twenty could be, when after taking a home and preparing it publicly in the face of the world with all the exultation and pride of a very young man, he had suddenly lost his bride by

her undreamed-of elopement with his most trusted friend. His dangerous, almost fatal illness, attended with the phrenzy of brain-fever; the subsequent misanthropy and isolation in which he had indulged himself; and the tacit sentence of banishment from Monkmoor Priory, which had excluded the culprits from the gay circles of Thornbury, where they had been the life and spirit of them all, tended to deepen the memory of Paul's disappointment. The whole story had been revived during the brief wonder at his second betrothal to Doris; and the return of the exiles with Emma to the Priory concentrated the attention of Thornbury upon the old romance, and the reunion of the actors in it. Mrs. Weston, whose husband had succeeded Paul in his practice, shook her head, and sighed significantly after her first call at the Priory, as she described what an exceedingly fascinating creature Harriet Crofton could still be; while Miss Arnold was nothing but a poor, spiritless, sickly-looking prude.

Rufus came home for the Christmas vacation, altered already by his short separation from its ties and dependencies. Much of his boyishness was gone, and there was a self-reliance and manliness in his whole manner hitherto foreign to it. The two months of steady conflict between duty and passion had accomplished the work of years for him ; the quiet dignity and gravity of his conversation brought him nearer to Paul's mental calibre and stature. The brothers were no longer protector and dependant, guardian and ward ; they had become fellows and equals. Rufus was fighting his battle with life, and its sorrows, as Paul had fought it before him ; and the noble, hearty, genuine strife was bringing maturity and mastery with it. Three months ago, this manliness might perchance have availed him with Doris. He felt it himself in the keen shame with which his memory and morbid sensitiveness recalled the boyish thoughts he had poured into her ear, and the boyish deeds he had acted in her presence.

It was all past now ; and in the calm, self-controlled tone of his renewed intercourse with her, Mrs. Margraf read the wisdom and success of her harmless stratagem.

Thus coming home ; grave, silent, and observant ; with little of the old heart of former days, except the hidden and absorbing love of his darling ; Rufus looked upon the home-circle with keen eyes. He saw Paul's first love in all the witchery and charm of her cherished beauty, plying skilful wiles to lure back her old lover. He detected with dismay Mrs. Margraf's quiet manœuvring, concealed from his boyish vision. He discovered Paul's negligence and coldness towards Doris, and the easy indifference with which he allowed Harriet Crofton to play off her dangerous spells upon him. Everything seemed changed. The fine superiority of Paul, and the tender cares of his sister had lost something of their former lustre ; even as the old town of Thornbury appeared smaller and less important. He shrank painfully from the dis-

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

covery ; but he had to meet it face to face with a clear-sighted vision, before which the former dreams vanished away. There might be dissimulation in Sophia ; there might be foibles in Paul ; and the boy, heart-sick from the first failing of implicit confidence in those whom he loved, turned with intenser devotion to Doris, who met him always with a frank and simple tenderness, which seemed to him even better and sweeter than the most passionate response to his own ardent love.

CHAPTER II.



THE Christmas gathering of the family had always been held at the Priory ; and Harriet Crofton was not without a sanguine hope that it might even be so this year. But Mrs. Aspen announced her intention of passing the festive day in solitude ; and Emma's code of mourning made it incumbent upon her to shut herself up in her own chamber, and drag through the hours in alternate bursts of tears, and snatches of sleep upon the sofa. There was no help for it, though Mrs. Crofton submitted with an ill grace. She had reckoned upon this annual reunion to effect a complete reconciliation with Mrs. Margraf, who was skilfully contriving to prevent her crossing the threshold at Fairfield ; and to accomplish this had

carefully avoided meeting her on any but the most distant terms. At present Paul's home was closed against her. Though he visited the Priory upon a familiar footing, and displayed no resentment whenever she ventured to allude to old times, he had never so traversed his sister's well-known prejudices as to invite her to visit him in his own dwelling.

After the morning service on Christmas-day, which she devoutly attended, sitting in the Priory pew beside Doris, and within view of Paul and Rufus, she lay in wait for them in the church porch, with a winning gaiety in her voice and manner. They must row her across the river, she said, for she had dismissed the old ferryman with his boat, trusting to some stray chance turning up. Or perhaps one or both of them would walk with her round by the bridge? The frost was clear and crisp, and the air was exhilarating; she could not bear to walk along the solitary lanes alone; she did not know why, but it made her feel timid. Suppose they

both came for a ramble ; and they would all go as far as the oak-uplands to see the beautiful silvery frost-work upon the trees : Paul knew her old love for winter scenery in the days when they were young like Rufus. She glanced entreatingly and sweetly upon both of them with a reserve, sidelong look at Paul, who immediately offered her his arm, and marched off with her in the sight of the observant congregation, with Rufus walking at his other hand.

Harriet was exceedingly piquante and amusing. Paul's spirits rose, as he looked down upon her animated face, kindling into smiles, and laughter, and quick, impetuous flushes of colour. It was a refreshing change and relaxation from his dreamy studies. He was slow to answer her sallies of drollery and banter, but they were not the less agreeable to him. The sharp repartee and quick jest were as pleasant as the keen, bracing air and the frosty sunshine ; and he surprised himself infinitely by his own efforts to reply,

which she received with flattering applause. His young days came back ; “ he had been a wit in his youth,” and the awakening, exhilarating influence of his first love broke the seal which had been laid upon his lips for years. Pleasant was the talk along the river side ; pleasant the laughter that rippled down its current ; pleasant even the breathless, silent pause, and the moistening of the bright eyes turned upon him for an instant, bedewed in tears, when they reached the oak-uplands, and stood, unintentionally of course, under the tree where they had first plighted their troth.

No word was spoken of the past, for Rufus stood beside them, grave and observant. The walk homewards was almost speechless ; with penitent sighs from Harriet, and a timid, fluttering pressure of her little hand upon Paul's arm. He spoke now and then in a lower and gentler key, for his thoughts were busy with the happier portions of their former intercourse ; the averted head upon

which his eyes rested from time to time hung down with a mournful and deprecating aspect, very different to the glowing, joyous face, which had been lifted to him before. There was something that touched him greatly in that sudden change ; and he lowered his voice to the softer and gentler tone as a token of his forgiveness.

“ You will come in ? ” she said, imploringly, as Paul opened the Priory door for her, and she stepped into the quiet hall, cloister-like with its arched ceiling and deep shadows. “ Richard has not yet seen Rufus. Paul, you will not leave me at the door this Christmas-day ? ”

It was impossible to resist her as she stood just within the gloomy walls, and looked at them with beseeching eyes, as if fearful that they were about to abandon her there, and for ever. Paul entered with alacrity ; and Rufus followed him with the same grave and observant mien. In and out of these rooms, up and down this oaken staircase, he had been wont to watch every step of Doris, as

she glided to and fro with her soft and measured tread. The whole place seemed full of her presence still. Here she listened to his boyish talk ; at yonder casement he stood aside and looked at her, while she gazed up to the glittering stars ; in this doorway she lingered with quiet graciousness to take from him a flower, which he had not dared to ask to fasten in her hair, as he had resolved to do when he gathered it from his most carefully-nurtured plant. All the place was eloquent of her to him ; and as he and Paul waited for the reappearance of Harriet Crofton with her husband, his mind ran rapidly over the memories associated with Doris.

Harriet came in at last without shawl or bonnet ; and alone. Paul had listened to her step and voice echoing through the silent house as if in some search, and now she entered with a pout upon her rosy lips, and a look of sadness on her face. Richard had left her, she said, plaintively ; he was posi-

tively gone out for the whole day visiting the Westons of Thornbury. It was cruel of him, for he knew that Emma was making herself ridiculous, and now she should be quite alone when they were gone.

She knelt down upon the hearth at Paul's feet, apparently to gather together the coals upon the glowing fire; but as she raised her eyes to him the light shone upon tears quivering within them, as if ready to escape from the overcharged lashes. Rufus had wandered to the casement where he had looked at Doris, while she gazed at the stars, and was leaning against it with his face turned from them; and Harriet permitted the tears to roll down her cheeks.

"Have you quite forgiven me, Paul?" she whispered, as he stooped to catch the words. "Are by-gones quite by-gones? I have never forgiven myself. I never shall, until I see you married, and happy with Doris."

"I have forgiven you certainly," replied Paul, "and in truth by-gones have been by-

gones long ago. It is many years since I ceased to be unhappy."

Mrs. Crofton winced and bit her lip ; but she looked up again with as soft an expression in her eyes.

"Then we may be friends, Paul," she said, "true friends. I should have been a very different woman, if—— Oh, Paul! you are good. Be sure I have been bitterly punished."

The words smote him, as she turned away without a second glance, and her whole frame appeared to droop with a concealed dejection. He longed to say something to comfort her, and restore the gaiety of her spirits. But before he had slowly collected a few sentences of common-place sentiment, she crossed the room, and addressed Rufus in her winning tones.

"You must come and tell me everything about college," she said. "I know nothing of university life. Nor of anything else, I believe. You never met with such a per-

fectly empty head as mine." She shook it with her usual depreciating manner, and looked so charming that Rufus wondered what she would have been with a little more mental and moral culture. She was irresistible enough as she was he thought, as he followed her to the hearth, and answered the thousand questions she found to ask him; while Paul sat by fascinated and unwilling to break up the agreeable pastime, which was so quickly making away with the unoccupied hours of the holiday.

It was growing dusk when Paul said they must go. Harriet became suddenly serious, and glanced round the large room, where the shadows were gathering darkly in every corner. There was no sound to be heard within doors or without, except the melancholy chirping of the birds about the ruins. She shivered nervously; and looked from one to the other as they stood before her, with a pretty air of hesitation and misgiving.

"Let me come with you," she said, like a

child pleading for some indulgence. "I cannot bear to be left alone. It is so hard to be quite by one's self upon Christmas-day. Do take me home with you, and I will not be any trouble. I will tell one of the servants to fetch me back."

There was no help for it. Paul smiled involuntarily as he remembered her old trickery and her mode of managing him ; but he could not refuse her petition. She by no means understood his expression ; though the glitter of his eyes awoke a smile in hers, and an air of triumph stole over her features.

"Well then," he answered, as if speaking to a child, "run and put your bonnet on. We'll take Sophia by surprise."

It was permission enough for Mrs. Crofton, who ran away to do as he bid her, and returned before he could change his mind. With admirable discretion she put her hand within Rufus's arm this time, and talked fondly and innocently of Doris, and as if she expected to meet her in Paul's home. She told him aloud

how greatly she admired her, and while Paul was unlinking the ferry-boat, whispered audibly how pleased, and thankful, and overjoyed she had been when Emma informed her of Paul's betrothal and expected marriage. Rufus was delighted with her frankness and cordiality, and above all with her simplicity; silently retracting his censures and suspicions, he no longer marvelled at the prolonged despair of Paul upon losing her, and the difficulty he had found in fixing his affections upon another.

Yet when they reached the high wall surrounding the Vicarage, the boy's step lagged, and his eye, seeking Paul's animated face, asked reproachfully if he were going to pass the home of Doris, so engrossed with Harriet as to have no thought of visiting her. There was certainly no such thought in Paul's mind, and apparently no recollection of the existence of Doris, even when he passed the narrow gate, which would have opened easily to his lover's touch. Harriet Crofton was laughing

merrily, and he joined in her mirth ; and neither of them observed that Rufus dropped behind, and watching them until they turned the corner of the wall, opened the gate noiselessly, and stole into the enclosed lawn.

His heart, full of the tenderest love and devotion, was very sore and jealous for Doris. He blamed Paul bitterly ; blamed him for being so attracted by Harriet ; blamed him for his easy neglect of Doris, and the apathy with which he possessed a treasure, that would have been beyond all price to himself. It was dark within the lofty walls, and beneath the thick branches of the trees overhead in spite of their wintry bareness, and he could creep along unseen, and perhaps catch a glimpse of Doris, before the curtains were drawn across the windows. He trode cautiously upon the grass bordering the gravel walk ; but the figure of a man coming hastily from the house brushed past him with rapid strides, and the yard-dog gave one loud, deep bay of fury, which rang

through the frosty air. Rufus paused, and stood for a minute or two irresolute and ashamed; but as the temporary disturbance ceased, he stole forward again.

The glass doors of the drawing-room which opened on to the lawn were uncurtained, and he could see the whole of the room at a glance. A chair or two were drawn up to the fire, as if lately occupied; but no one was there except Doris, and she was sitting upon a low footstool, with her face sunk almost to her knees, and covered with both her hands. The attitude was one of profound dejection, and he saw that she trembled either with cold or sorrow. Leaning forward more anxiously, he discovered that the doors were not closed, the latch having slipped without fastening, and that the chilly night air was penetrating into the room. With an eager and unsteady hand he drew them together, and the click of the latch made Doris turn round hastily.

She crossed the floor quickly and quietly,

without any appearance of alarm, and threw open the door in silence. But as Rufus presented himself with a murmured apology, she cast a glance of affright into the darkness behind him, and locked the door hurriedly. There were the traces of recent tears upon her cheeks, but she tried to hide them from him by keeping her face from the light, and shading her eyes with her hand, and Rufus would not appear to notice her agitation.

“I was passing by,” he said, gently, “and I took a fancy to play a boy’s trick upon you all. I have not frightened you, Doris?”

“Not at all,” she answered in a whisper; but she looked back at the uncurtained window, and shivered again as if he had really alarmed her.

“I did not even intend to come in,” he continued, earnestly, “especially when I saw that you were alone. But the door was unfastened, and the air is bitterly cold to-night.

You are not strong, Doris ; and you take no care of yourself."

Such a tender, thoughtful tone of remonstrance ; but Doris said nothing in reply, and sank down upon one of the chairs, as if she had not strength to stand any longer.

"You do not think how precious you are to all of us," he said. "I see a great change in you since I left home, which may escape Paul's notice, as he is with you every day. You are feebler, and more nervous than you used to be. I am your brother, Doris ; and I cannot help being grieved for you."

"I wish God had given me such a brother," cried Doris, with a sudden passion of tears, which brought Rufus on his knees beside her, soothing her with every tenderness of tone and manner, and with a delicious sense of pleasure thrilling through all his frame.

"There, I'm better now," she murmured after a while, shaking back her loosened hair, and laying both her hands in his as he knelt before her. "You are as good as a brother

to me, Rufus ; better than I deserve. You are my very best, truest, most faithful friend."

"Except Paul," he whispered, his face bent closely to hers.

"Ah ! he does not care for me half as much as you do," she answered, mournfully.

He listened to the words with a sharp pang of mingled pain and pleasure. He knew that it was true. Who could love her as he did ? He sprang to his feet, and strode across the room with a poignant and strong renewal of the conflict with which honour and passion strove for the mastery over him. Paul was slighting Doris before his eyes, and leaving her in melancholy solitude, while he entertained himself with Harriet Crofton, and her unwomanly coquetry. He could call her a coquette there, when he was freed from the fascination of her presence ; but he could not help owning her attractions, and fearing that Doris would

never possess an equal influence over Paul. It was a miserable thing for him to come home, and find Doris unhappy ; losing her confidence in his brother, and not without some reason. It would have been a smaller trial, he said to himself, if he had been obliged to witness their devoted attachment to one another, for then the thought of their happiness might have counterbalanced his own sorrow ; but it was too hard to see Paul care lightly for her.

“Doris,” he said, coming back to her, and addressing her in the low, sweet tones which he reserved for her alone, “you know that I care greatly for you. But be sure that Paul loves you truly ; only you keep aloof from him too shyly ; and Harriet Crofton uses every effort to please him. He is a reserved man, is Paul ; very absent ; not such a lover as would win the hearts of most women. But you are not like other women, Doris ; you can do without any of the follies of love-making such as a boy like me might be guilty

of. You would be weary and displeased if a man wooed you foolishly. You can love Paul for what he is ; a thoughtful, studious, abstracted scholar, who will think of you sometimes amidst his books."

He checked himself abruptly, as he looked down upon her face, which was turned to him with the forlorn and homeless expression, that Atcherley had discovered in it.

"We must not talk about Paul," she said. "He is your brother, Rufus ; and my—my friend," she added with a heightened colour. "I am not afraid of him, or for him, in any way. But I am very sorrowful to-night. An old trouble was brought to my mind while I was sitting here alone ; and it is that which made me so foolish just now."

His eyes were fastened upon her in silence, speaking the great wish of his heart that he could shield her from every trouble. She smiled once more, and spoke in a cheerful tone.

“There are the Christmas bells again,” she said. “I hope you will hear them for many happy years in this very room. Rufus, I always think of this place as your future home. You will think of me sometimes when you are living here, even when you are old and grey-headed like Mr. Vale.”

Think of her! When would he ever cease to think of her? His large dark eyes answered her, but his lips were mute. Doris sighed disconsolately.

“Do you know,” she said, at last, “that the Selection is almost finished? Paul has been working at it. I will go and fetch it for you.”

He was at the door to open it for her before she could reach it; but to his surprise he found it locked. A look of fright, and a deep flush crossed Doris's face; but she met his inquiring and astonished glance steadily, and spoke without hesitation.

“It was I who locked it inside,” she said. “I did not wish to be interrupted; but you

came in from the garden. The key turns easily, Rufus."

The key did turn easily, and he threw open the door, gazing after her with an air of perplexity. She did not return alone, but brought Mrs. Aspen with her, and engaged Rufus in looking over the later pages of the Selection with the poetess herself. She drew the curtains over each of the windows, and having thus shut out the night, and screened the room from the observation of any other stragglers, sat down in the shade, and spoke but little in reply to any of the remarks made to her.

CHAPTER III.

THE Selection being finished under its title of "Monkmoor Roundelays," and Doris having completed the arrangement of her father's scattered journal, it was agreed in full family conclave, that no time should be lost in giving Mrs. Aspen's poems to the world. Paul strongly urged her to go with Doris to London, and to carry out the enterprise with energy. There was Lieutenant Arnold's posthumous work to be brought out; and their presence upon the spot could not fail to quicken the publisher into greater expedition. Time, said Paul, was precious; and Mrs. Aspen, smiling covertly amid all the sad reflections which her finished work called forth, guessed that he referred to himself and Doris, whose promise to John upon

his deathbed was, as she supposed, the only barrier to their speedy marriage.

Sorrowful as she still was, the bereaved mother did not wish all her world to be gloomy and mourning. Though she would willingly have postponed the publication of her cherished poems, in her reluctance to the exertion it demanded from her, she had a strong desire, growing into a deep anxiety, to set Paul and Doris free from their promise. Their home was to become hers as soon as they were married; already Paul had taken John's place in her affections, so far as any one could fill up the void caused by the death of her own and only son. As the longed-for consummation of her wishes could only follow upon the completion of her book, she endeavoured to shake off the dull languor and depression that weighed upon her spirits, so sanguine and so airy in days of old. It never occurred to her mind that Paul would not consider himself a necessary and natural companion in their expedition.

She had visions flitting before her of bridal preparations made in London, sober and quiet as became the circumstances of a marriage solemnized so soon after the death of one of the family ; yet there would be wedding purchases, discussed in confidential chats with herself, and brought in pleasant surprises to Doris. Nor did she ever imagine herself standing face to face with a publisher unsupported by his presence ; and musing as she did of pacing the crowded streets of London, she always saw herself upon Paul's arm, while Doris walked beside them, not grudging the attention he paid to her, an aged woman. So assured was Mrs. Aspen that Paul's escort was part of the proposed journey, that no other suspicion crossed her mind until a day or two before the time fixed for their departure.

“ We shall be very quiet after you are all gone,” said Paul to her one evening, when she and the family from the Priory were having a kind of farewell meeting at Fair-

field, where Harriet Crofton had now established her footing ; and he glanced towards Doris and Rufus, who sat apart from the rest conversing in low tones.

“But you are going with us, my dear Paul,” exclaimed Mrs. Aspen in a voice of dismay which arrested the attention of all the party.

“I believe not,” he replied. “I have been speaking about it to Doris, and she is content to accept Rufus for her escort, if you will be satisfied with him. He will see you safely and comfortably settled before he leaves for Cambridge.”

“John would have stayed with us all the time,” she said, tremulously.

Paul's heart smote him, and he shot a second glance at Doris, who paused in her conversation, and listened attentively to every word he spoke.

“Miss Arnold assures me she is quite able to manage without my help,” he said, stiffly. “If my presence were necessary I would

set aside every consideration ; but she is acquainted with Lieutenant Arnold's publishers, and has already communicated with them. They will give you better advice and assistance than I could render with the Selection. You will be in London for some weeks, and my studies——”

“I could not think of interrupting them,” she said, bridling a little.

“Paul,” cried Mrs. Margraf, hesitating and embarrassed, “I should think you might go. It is so long since you were in London, that it will do you good. You are rusting here.”

“I fully intended to go,” he replied, “but upon second thoughts I see no necessity for it. Rufus will take care of both of you there, and Doris will introduce you to her publishers.”

Harriet Crofton regarded Paul's embarrassment and Doris's downcast face with a feeling of triumph. There was certainly some string jarring between them, but whether at her

touch or not she could not judge. Mrs. Aspen maintained a dignified and offended silence ; and Mrs. Margraf appeared miserable, and uncertain what to say. The awkward pause was broken by Doris coming forward and placing herself at the back of Mrs. Aspen's chair, her face glowing with vivid blushes.

“It is entirely my fault,” she said, in a low voice, “all my friends live in London, friends of my father ; and Dr. Lockley—that is I—or rather both of us agreed that we should not meet them together. I would a great deal rather not. I should not like any of them to hear”—and Doris stopped abruptly, and hid her face upon the high back of Mrs. Aspen's chair.

The confused speech was heard with varying emotions by all in the room. Paul looked distressed and perplexed, and Mrs. Margraf afraid ; while Rufus and Harriet gazed at Doris in simple astonishment. Mrs. Aspen's dignified features sustained their air of

amazement for a minute or two, and then relaxed into an indulgent smile.

“Child! child!” said she, “you do not wish to meet your father’s friends in the company of your betrothed husband! fie! fie! Is there anything to be ashamed of in Paul Lockley? Is there anything in him that even your father could not approve? This is being too fastidious. You cannot conceal your marriage, if you make a secret of your engagement.”

“I cannot,” murmured Doris, “I cannot meet my father’s friends with him!” And turning swiftly away, she fled from the eyes that were fastened upon her; leaving most of them in a state of extreme surprise.

“Miss Arnold,” said Paul, rising with a book in his hand preparatory to making his own retreat to his library, “has mentioned this subject to me some days past, and distinctly declined my proposed escort. I understand and appreciate her delicate reserve; and I have made every arrangement

possible for your comfort, my dear aunt. I have secured apartments for you in the house of Tomlines, who used to live in Thornbury, and now lives near St. James's Park. Rufus will see you settled there ; but I greatly regret that I cannot accompany you myself. Miss Arnold's wishes are commands to me."

He left the room with a pace somewhat more stately and measured than usual ; not a word was spoken while every one listened to the sound of his receding footsteps, wondering whether they would follow Doris's flight, or bear him to the retreat of his own library. The closed doors and soft carpets made it uncertain, and Harriet Crofton longed for some excuse to steal out, lynx-eyed and velvet-footed, to reconnoitre, but Mrs. Margraf's vigilant presence prevented her. Doris returned after awhile sad and subdued, and as Paul did not again make his appearance, Mrs. Aspen relapsed into meditative dulness for the rest of the evening.

The journey to London was accomplished

without adventure ; and Rufus saw Mrs. Aspen and Doris safely established in their temporary apartments in Mayfair. It was evident that he was not so much taking care of Doris, as Doris of him ; for this was his first visit to the metropolis, and she was a native of it. Yet there was an exquisite pleasure in being directed by her ; in being told where to go, and what to look at ; and above all in having her almost entirely to himself, as during the first day or two Mrs. Aspen was fatigued with her journey, and was in too great a flurry and flutter of spirits to enter upon her business. Rufus took no account of time, and would have forgotten the appointed day for his return to college, if Doris had not insisted upon his departure. Then he left Mrs. Aspen, with her treasured manuscript, to search after a publisher for the Monkmoor Roundelays.

CHAPTER IV.



SINCE the last touches had been given to the portrait of Mrs. Aspen ; during the painting of which some of the happiest dreams of the artist's life had passed before him in dim and shadowy visions ; Robert Atcherley had seen Doris but once, on the occasion when Rufus had persuaded her and Paul to accompany him to Murivance. He believed that he had never looked for any regard from her beyond the merest ordinary friendship ; yet when the blow was struck, which smote him to the heart, he discovered that hope had been weaving some subtle and feeble threads into the tissue of his thoughts. He yielded her at once to Paul ; and then shunned every mention of her name, and every chance of seeing her. In the shortening winter-days,

when every other pleasure-boat was taken off the sluggish and freezing river, his shot along under the impetus of his powerful oar, but always down the stream, in the opposite direction to Monkmoor and Fairfield. The river in its downward current ran through the low, unwholesome portion of the town, where the damp and decaying houses were huddled and crowded upon the banks. The wintry desolation and misery of the poor streets attracted him in his present mood as much as the picturesque ruins of the Priory repelled him. Resting upon his oars sometimes, to survey the meagre tragedies of every-day life as he had been wont to linger and gaze upon Doris's figure in the oriel window, he would hasten back to Murivance to paint melancholy pictures of the squalor and degradation he had witnessed.

His disappointment changed him into a pre-Raphaelite. As he could no longer live an ideal life ; and he glanced cynically at his own dwarfed person in the mirror which

reflected with equal faithfulness the great beauty of his face ; he would no longer idealize his paintings. Deformity and loveliness, and common vulgarity, should be portrayed with evenhanded touches. His art should be simply faithful to nature. He would neither soften blemishes nor heighten beauties. The hard, bare facts of life should stand out upon his canvas. He would detect with microscopic accuracy the defects and evils, the germs or past traces of passion, the follies and miseries of the faces which he copied.

He painted rapidly during this period, as if to atone for his brief inconstancy to his art ; and his pictures sold as quickly as he produced them. Men were as pleased to have pictorial representations of the misery driven into concealment in the dark and beggarly slums of their city, as they were to read any eloquent and pathetic description of it. Both awoke their commiseration and sympathy with a delicate touch, and sighing over them with ineffectual wishes that the degradation

could be removed, they felt as if they had fulfilled a duty. The green rot of the decayed houses ; the broken roofs and crazy casements ; the fierce, unwashed, and unshaven faces of the men ; the leering prettiness of the women ; the tatters of the half-naked children : all these they said in tones of praise were life-like, and they hung up the evidences of their own shame as trophies of a refined civilization ; poring over the miserable details of the picture, they were gratified by the skill and faithfulness of the artist.

Some months ago he would have told you that the office of his art was to open to men the closed gates of the Paradise from which they were exiled. To enter there in vision, as one of the master-painters had done ; to catch the tinge of the seven-fold light, as it gleamed upon banks of coolest green, and upon flowers blooming with unfading lustre ; to look upon faces, innocent and beautiful, yet vivid with the fullest and most impas-

sioned life, as they might have been had no curse fallen upon them ; to weed out all the thorns, and gather together everything that is lovely ; to present his work to his fellow-men for their refreshment and refining, and bid them see the Eden for which they were secretly longing, and back to which all things true and lovely were eternally tending. This had been his ambition only a few months ago.

Mrs. Atcherley, who could not fasten her eyes upon her son's face with the secret solicitude of a mother, felt the change in his moody silence, and by the pictures, which he still described to her in reply to her importunate questionings. He did not hang any of them upon the walls of her sitting-room ; there the paintings remained in the order in which Doris had seen them ; but when she came into his studio, with her wistful, visionless eyes turned upon his canvas, and demanded what subject occupied him, he described it to her with every harsh detail of misery and degradation. The mother learned

by this change how much he had hoped, and how much he suffered ; and she, also, longing for the soft and pleasant voice of Doris, and her daughter-like gentleness, grieved incessantly over the betrothal, which had uprooted her hidden hopes. Her son was successful, and on the way to wealth and honour equal to her highest expectations ; but it was all as nothing so long as he continued unhappy.

The artist was busy on a group of ragged children, dancing at the door of a gin-palace to the music of a tambourine-player within. The scene had attracted him by its unconscious childish revelry in the midst of the squalor and famine surrounding it, and the merry faces of the half-starved children laughed joyously from among their fluttering rags. Drawing near to this group was a pale, patient woman, whose homeless and solitary face bore a faint resemblance to Doris. He was intently absorbed in the worn outlines of her features, when the door of his

studio was thrown open, and a guest entered alone and unannounced.

The stranger paused for a minute or two, for Mr. Atcherley seemed regardless of his entrance. A sunbeam that fell across his face as he stood within the door, revealed it as one which had been often transferred to the artist's pictures. Whenever a type of mere masculine beauty had been needed, as differing from manly power and energy, the finely-chiselled features of the visitor had been the model. He stood smiling, with a half-sneer upon his lip, at the profound abstraction of Atcherley ; and stepping forward with soft footfalls, looked over his shoulder at the face growing beneath his pencil.

"Pretty enough," he said, in a tone of light criticism. "I have seen a face it reminds me of somewhere. But there is not sufficient flesh for me. I like your buxom women who have some colour about them."

"Exactly so," answered Atcherley, quietly and without looking round. "Tom Fanshawe

sees only the flesh, and cares nothing about the spirit."

"Not when it is a woman's," he replied, this time with a finished sneer. "But I care particularly for yours just now, Atcherley. Shake hands, old fellow. You told me I might look you up some day, when I had time on my hands ; so here I am to take you at your word. I'll sit for you every day of the week if you want me. I have turned over a regular new leaf, and am going to be steady ; so give me a welcome, and a helping hand, old boy."

Atcherley dropped his pencil, and offered his hand cordially to his guest. He had wanted some change, some fresh stirring of his existence ; and Tom Fanshawe's blithe tone and manner fell pleasantly upon the sombre monotony which he had permitted to enshroud him. They had been fellow-students at the Royal Academy, and had sojourned together for a few months in Rome ; and Fanshawe recalled old frolics and adventures

which had almost died out of his memory. The unwonted sound of loud voices and laughter from her son's studio reached the mother's ears, and with her slow and cautious movements she ascended the stairs, and gained the threshold of the open door.

It was Tom Fanshawe's maxim to please every woman with whom he came in contact ; and his manner was too winning for him ever to fail. No sooner did his eyes fall upon the homely figure and eager, questioning face of his friend's mother, than he lowered his voice into softer modulations, and hastened to conduct her to a seat with careful gentleness. Nor when he had informed her that he and Atcherley had been friends in Rome, and had been reviving old memories, would he hear of her returning to her lonely room, but insisted upon all of them adjourning thither together, that she might listen to their talk of old times. Mrs. Atcherley was delighted. She had her son with her, and he was talking gaily as she had almost ceased to hope he

would ever do again ; and her heart opened at once to the considerate and pleasant-toned stranger who had already wrought so great a change.

He praised her son too ; praised him frankly and largely, passing from one picture to another with exclamations of delight ; until having spoken of the paintings which hung on each side of Doris's portrait, Mrs. Atcherley trembled, while he paused as if examining it closely.

“ This is the same face as the one you were painting, Atcherley,” he said ; “ is it a real face or not ? It looks like a portrait.”

It is real,” said Mrs. Atcherley, with a sigh. “ A dear, sweet young lady, who came into these parts a few months ago. She is living with Mrs. Aspen of Monkmoor Priory.”

“ I almost fancy I have seen the face,” he continued, in a thoughtful tone. “ I have a faint recollection of some author's daughter, who came to me about her father's portrait. He was going abroad somewhere.”

“Lieutenant Arnold,” answered Atcherley.

“He was going to Africa.”

“That’s it!” exclaimed Fanshawe. “I was struck with the young lady’s face, and would have taken her portrait, though I could not undertake her father’s. Bearded faces are not in my line. So Miss Arnold is living in this neighbourhood?”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Atcherley. “Mrs. Aspen is a poetess, and she came to help her to make up a volume of poems. They went to London a few days since to get them published. She is a very sweet young lady. Mrs. Aspen’s nephew, Dr. Lockley of Fairfield, fell in love with her, and they are engaged.”

“Engaged!” echoed Fanshawe, with a voice and look of amazement; “engaged! It is impossible!”

“Nay, it is true,” she said; “and they would have been married before now most likely, only Mrs. Aspen’s son, John Aspen of Monkmoor Priory, was killed by a fall from

the ruins, and Mrs. Aspen has left the Priory. Doris, that is her name, came here two or three weeks after with Dr. Lockley, for a copy of that very portrait, and she told me with her own voice that they were engaged."

The poor mother ended with a sigh of disappointment, not lost upon Tom Fanshawe ; and Atcherley made a hasty retreat from the room.

"My son feels it very much," she continued, softly. "You are his friend, and I can tell you all about it, for I am sure you are kind-hearted. Robert loved Doris ; and I used to hope that in spite of that accident he had when I was going blind, he might perhaps win her love. He is so good and precious to me, and Doris used to speak to him in a kindly, loving voice, that sounded like music to both of us. Dr. Lockley is a talented man, and so is my son. They say—she said to me herself—he is not half as handsome and noble-looking as my Robert.

But he was with her every day, and he is a richer man than Robert."

"Has he much money?" inquired Fanshawe, with an air of interest.

"He has the Fairfield estate," answered Mrs. Atcherley; "they are all very well off, they tell me. There is young Mrs. Aspen, John Aspen's widow, who lives at the Priory now, she must have about 800*l.* a year, I suppose. They have a very good position in the county. The younger brother, Rufus Lockley, who is a great friend of Robert's, was very much in love with Doris, but it was Paul who won her."

"By George!" cried Fanshawe, "she is a lucky girl, this Doris. Bob Atcherley, and the two brothers, Paul and Rufus, in love with her at once! I was a little bit spooney myself, I remember, when she came about her father's portrait. There is something about her that touches one's heart. So she chose the richest lover? A prudent young lady too."

“ Oh ! there is nothing of that in Doris,” she said, eagerly. “ She loves him ; she said so to me, quietly and gravely, as if it was some solemn truth. But they tell me that his old love, some Mrs. Crofton, is come to visit at the Priory, and that he has neglected Doris ever since. I don’t know. If it is true, my son will not easily forgive it. He might have left our Doris alone.”

“ Mrs. Crofton ? ” mused Fanshawe ; “ is her husband’s name Richard ? and have they been wandering about the Continent for the last few years ? A dark-haired gipsy sort of beauty, is she ? ”

“ They have been on the Continent a good deal,” replied Mrs. Atcherley, “ and her husband’s name is Richard, I know. But neither my son nor I has met with them. They have now been at the Priory these two months ; and they say there are strange goings-on already with parties, and card-playing and pleasure. Mrs. John Aspen is very easy.”

“By George! this is luck,” muttered Fanshawe to himself, with a smile upon his handsome features, as he raised his eyes once more to the picture of Doris, and saluted it with a mocking gallantry. Throughout the rest of the day an aspect of complete satisfaction and complacency pervaded his face, and he listened to Mrs. Atcherley’s lengthened conversations about her son with a patience that entirely won her friendship. The artist himself was relieved by the presence of an animated and entertaining companion. When he accompanied him to his low-roofed chamber in one of the gables of Murivance, he bade him with unaffected hospitality look upon his house as a home, as long as he could consent to bury himself in the obscurity of a country town.

CHAPTER V.

ALL the dark days of the winter were past. Already in the ruins of Monkmoor Priory the birds that had slept through the cold and dreary season in the shelter of the empty niches, and beneath the clustering ivy, began to grow bold in the brief sunshine, to chirp cheerily and carelessly from every broken cusp and grey fretwork. Higher up the mouldering wall, a little in advance of all preceding years, delicate tendrils of the greenest ivy climbed cautiously; and the brambles crowning the summit of the arches bloomed out of their brown deadness into a purple dawning of life. The river, swollen in its course by the melting of the snows amongst the mountains from whence it sprang, flowed past tumultuously, with a

rapid, resistless sweep of water, that scarcely bore for a moment the shadows of the changeless and motionless arches. It was no easy task to row up the heavy current ; but so much the more it became an object of emulation to the oarsmen of Thornbury, and to row up to Monkmoor and back was the chosen pastime of every leisure hour.

Since Mrs. Aspen's departure for London Emma's spirits had revived vastly. Harriet assured her that it was both sinful and foolish to persist in mourning so long, and to refuse to be comforted. To say the least of it, it certainly manifested a spirit of rebellion against the decrees of Providence ; and since John could not return to her, she must wait to go to him. Emma's heart was beginning to think that the longer this inevitable separation lasted the better and pleasanter it would be to herself. The monument to John's memory had been erected nearly three months, and the first gloss of the marble was just dimming with the dust that

settled upon it week after week in the old church. Days of sorrow are long and tedious, and crowd the life of weeks and months into their creeping hours; and to Emma Aspen it seemed to be whole years since John was carried in from the ruins, dying. It proved to be a very pleasant position, that of sole mistress at the Priory; of being courted and flattered and humoured by Harriet Crofton; and it would be utter selfishness in her to immure one so bright and charming within the dull walls of a house of mourning. So Emma laid aside her own grief, and joined very comfortably in the quiet course of pleasure-seeking which Harriet skilfully directed.

Mrs. Margraf, who had been foiled in her design of keeping Harriet Crofton cut of Fairfield, yielded gracefully to her triumph in this point, but rejoiced in secret at her want of policy in throwing open the doors of the Priory to the gay though small parties which she gathered about her. That Mrs. Aspen would disapprove highly of so unusual

a revelry and so indiscriminating an hospitality within her ancient home ; which had been in a great measure closed as a classic sanctuary against the intrusion of merely commonplace guests ; was a fact which Mrs. Margraf could not doubt ; and she did not fail to hint, whenever she wrote to her or Doris, in slight but telling outlines, at the kind of life that was going on at the Priory. Paul himself was getting into the habit of crossing over there most evenings, and she felt it to be part of her duty to accompany him ; but this latter circumstance was never mentioned in her frequent letters.

The pleasure-taking was conducted upon the whole with due regard to decorum, and would not have seemed either strange or premature in any other dwelling. Only those who were excluded from the pleasant circle shook their heads, and sighed as they reckoned the months since the master of the Priory died. But these grumblers were few, for neither Emma nor Harriet was fastidious

in her taste for friends who could relieve the tedium of a country residence. Though each assembly was in itself small in numbers, the whole were so varied as to comprise at different times all who could lay any claim to a visiting acquaintance at the Priory. Harriet Crofton knew what she was about. A card-table or two, where some quiet play could be carried on now and then late into the night; or a few dancers, who would pair off in harmonious couples, needing no other entertainment, and would leave her undisturbed to her own pursuits,—these were the parties that were within her reach, and which suited her well enough so long as they left her at liberty to play off her charms upon her former lover.

One thing troubled her. She had need of an ally who should beat up the preserves and thicket whither her game was wont to retreat, and whither she could not follow it. She knew of old that faces were seen for a few times at her card-tables or in her quad-

rilles, and then disappeared altogether from the circle. Whatever attractions she possessed they were only potent up to a certain point; beyond that they seemed to fail utterly. A few days' abstinence from her society sufficed for a complete cure; and she wanted some one to pursue the deserters, and bring them back to her ranks. Mr. Crofton was of no use to her; he had a purblind faith in his wife; but it was rather because he closed his eyes in peaceful slumber than that the power of vision was not there. He would let her follow her own course unrestrained, but she must not look to him for any partnership. Let her flirt or gamble as she pleased, or as the fools who were drawn in by her were willing to do; but no countenance should they receive from him except the swarthy face shut up in slumber, dreaming of his farming operations, which they could turn to look at upon the sofa near at hand. Harriet Crofton felt that she was in dire need of some devoted confederate,

who should avoid setting up a claim as a lover.

It was when her necessity seemed greatest that chance brought her the very ally she wanted. She and Emma were sitting in languid conversation in Mrs. Aspen's oriel window, their white arms resting luxuriously upon the cushioned window-sill, their heads thrust forward to command a better view up and down the river, which at intervals throughout the afternoon had borne past them a few boats and coracles floating down with the drift, or struggling laboriously against it. There was a boat coming now up from Thornbury, containing a single oarsman, who, as far away as they could see him, was striving gallantly against the swollen current. A tall, athletic, handsome man he appeared as he came in full sight; and Harriet Crofton, with a little shriek of excitement, fluttered against the window like a bird against the bars of its cage.

“It is Tom Fanshawe!” she cried. “Handsome Tom! clever Tom! Be quick and move, Emma. Let me open the window. He is turning already. He will not know I am here. Tom Fanshawe! Tom Fanshawe!”

The stranger was resting upon his oars, and idly drifting back towards the town, with a smile upon his downcast face, when the casement was flung open, and the utterance of his own name appeared to arrest him. Not at once did he glance upwards, but looked round upon the banks until Harriet Crofton's cries became more eager.

“Tom Fanshawe!” she called again, “will you not look up? There is nobody in the fields wanting you. Look up here, Tom! Don't you remember me?”

Tom Fanshawe lifted his eyes to the oriel window with an air of perplexity and deliberation, while he balanced his boat upon the turbid water. A courtly smile played upon his handsome features, until memory recalled

the lady's name, and then his face beamed with pleasure.

"Is it possible?" he replied. "Pardon me; but nothing except the utter improbability that you should be immured here could make me hesitate for a moment."

The voice was clear and musical. His face, no longer shaded by his hat, was the handsomest Emma had ever looked upon. His eyes passed on from Harriet to herself, and she received a direct and graceful bow of acknowledgment.

"I believe you do not remember my name now," said Harriet, coquettishly. "I am soon forgotten."

"Impossible!" cried Tom Faushawe. "Have I forgotten Rome? or Paris? or Baden? or the hundred places where I have seen you? But here!"

There was such an accent of regret and commiseration in his voice, and such a glance from his dark eyes of mingled amazement and gladness at seeing her there, that Harriet

implored him to fasten his boat to the landing step, and to join them at once.

“I will come down and show you the place,” she said; and flying swiftly downstairs, and out into the spring sunshine along the banks, while he directed his boat by her steps, she was at hand to help him to fasten it to the chain. It was her usual plan with all men. They liked the gleam of her white hand upon their tackle, whether it helped them with their object or not. As her slender fingers lifted the heavy chain, Tom Fanshawe took it out of their grasp, and bending low over the delicate palm, pressed his lips gallantly upon it.

“That will do,” she said, laughing. “Mark you, Tom, I don’t want you to be spooney; we know each other too well for that. Come, tell me quickly, what has brought you to Thornbury?”

“I could not do better than follow you,” he answered, evasively; and offering her his arm, they walked up and down the terrace

in animated conversation ; while Emma looked down grudgingly at their laughter, and admiringly at the gay, bland, graceful demeanour of the stranger. Tom Fanshawe surveyed the Priory with a keen scrutiny beneath his assumed gaiety. Having talked a sufficient time with Mrs. Crofton, he stepped into his boat again, and with farewell gestures as they parted, he drifted down the stream speedily, and was lost to Emma's view.

“He is coming again to-night,” said Harriet, re-entering the study and meeting Emma's gloomy face. “I could not induce him to come in this morning, for he is positively afraid of you. There are such reports about you at Thornbury that he fancies you a weeping, melting Niobe, and he is afraid of weeds and willow, he says. I could not persuade him even to come at all until I assured him you would leave off that odious cap. He is staying at Thornbury for a little while, and you don't know what a gain he will be to our society.”

Tom Fanshawe made his appearance again in the evening, and assumed towards the young widow an air of delicate and considerate feeling. He was neither sad nor merry with her, but gave her the impression of a constant and pervading attention to all her moods. It was a little like John's old carefulness and devotion; but there was an especial grace about Tom Fanshawe which raised his attentions far above the awkward blunders of John. Altogether it touched her. In spite of Harriet's warning, she melted into tears on a quiet occasion when no one else was observing her; and speaking in a faltering voice she said his kindness overcame her; it was so like the fondness of her dear, dead husband.

CHAPTER VI.

DORIS met with no difficulty in disposing of her manuscript. She had written beforehand to the publishers of her father's former works, and they hailed with alacrity the offer of a posthumous volume of Lieutenant Arnold's. The terms offered satisfied Doris; the season being slack, the Christmas books past, and no new novels on hand, the publication of the journal proceeded expeditiously. Down in the country Paul read a notice in the pages of the *Athenæum*, that a posthumous journal of the ill-fated naturalist and African explorer Lieutenant Arnold was likely to be soon submitted to the public; and his face wore a transient triumph, and his heart quickened with a throb of pleasure on Doris's account. Rufus heard of its success from Doris herself, and kissed the words

which her hand had traced to him. Atcherley read aloud the announcement to his mother, and explained their interest in it to their guest, Tom Fanshawe, who manifested a more lively concern in the intelligence than might have been expected from so comparative a stranger. The success which had attended Doris's venture awoke a keener curiosity about Mrs. Aspen's poems; many times that day was the question asked, and remained unanswered, "How do the Monk-moor Roundelays prosper?"

In the crowded streets of London, and in the small, confined rooms of her unfamiliar lodgings, where she had neither the liberty nor the reverence of country life, the poetess would have replied to the inquiry with a very sore heart. Notwithstanding her introduction into the temple of literature, by means of Doris's friendship with the eminent publishers of her father's writings, Mrs. Aspen could advance no farther than the outer vestibule, which was filled with needy sup-

plicants, and impudent charlatans. Poetry was a drug, a worthless superfluity in the market. Every house had already more verses in print than they could find readers for ; and from one publisher after another the Monkmoor Roundelays came back with a courteous but positive rejection. Doris had been herself with the beautifully-embellished volume of manuscript to two or three publishers, with whom she was acquainted ; but though they bestowed a little more attention upon it, the result was always the same. No sympathy could altogether understand the bitterness of the trial to the aged authoress. They were the cherished work of a lifetime, and they were vanishing away like a dream. In the same dull room where Doris was busy correcting proof-sheets, and copying the rough sketches made in haste by her father, to fit them for the art of the engraver, Mrs. Aspen sat brooding over her faded hopes. The one borne down with work ; the other oppressed by failure.

In the depth of her mortification Mrs. Aspen felt as if she could never return to her old circle of friends and admirers. Every one about Thornbury had spread her fame as a poetess, and had known of this latest ambition. John and Emma had made no secret of her intended purpose ; and the booksellers had hinted at orders lying ready for the announcement of the published work. The painting, which was to have been engraved for the frontispiece, hung upon the walls of her ancient home, with the lofty air of triumph on its brow, and the dreamy gaze of poesy in its eye ; no person had entered within the Priory doors since its commencement without having his attention drawn to the portrait, with a whispered intimation of its design. She thanked God, in the bitterness of her spirit, that John had been spared from knowing of her failure. Yet there was Mr. Vale, who had listened to her poems with an admiration, and a faith not inferior to John's ; he a beneficed clergy-

man, and a Master of Arts in the University of Cambridge. She must meet him, and be lowered in his eyes; in Paul's also, and Sophia's; and worst sting of all, in Emma's mean and paltry opinion.

These thoughts were busy in her brain, when Doris, hard at work near the window, heard a choking sob, and turning quickly round, saw Mrs. Aspen's grey head bent down helplessly upon her hands, and her slender wasted form quivering with emotion. She was at her side in an instant, with her arms round her neck, and her hands pressing the grey head tenderly to her bosom.

"It is nothing, my dear," said Mrs. Aspen, after a while lifting herself up with her old air of dignity. "I have been dwelling too much upon old times. My love, it seems somewhat hard that after my life had glided on so placidly until old age was come, all these things should befall me now. My son dead; my birth-place stained; my poems worthless and rejected. Doris, they are very

precious to me ; they are the work of my mind for these fifty years ; all my thoughts have been embalmed in them ; and now it seems as if I should have done more good in the world had I been some dairymaid. It is a hard thing to discover at last, when it is too late, that they are mere chaff, with no grain of wheat among them ; the mere refuse and litter of a wasted life."

Doris answered only by a kiss falling softly upon the forehead shaded by grey hair.

"I begin to fear," continued Mrs. Aspen, "that you have all been deceiving me, kindly and lovingly perhaps ; but now the illusion is over, the plain, honest truth is very bitter. Sophia should not have led me into this ; she has been playing upon an old woman's vanity. John was true ; and Reginald Vale is true. But you, Doris, you, and Paul, and Sophia ; how could you have the heart to lead me into this humiliation ?"

Doris's tears were falling fast, and Mrs.

Aspen looked up fondly into her sorrowful face.

"I do not wish to be harsh with you, my love," she said; "but if you had only had the courage to say to me that this must be the fate of poems like mine, you would have saved me from a vexing and grievous sorrow."

"How could I? how could I?" murmured Doris.

"Well, you could not perhaps," replied Mrs. Aspen, soothingly; "and most likely I should not have believed you without this experience. But it is Sophia who has fostered my vanity; and she has done it for years. And now, how am I to return to my native place? I am too old to try once more. How can I go back with all my work pronounced worthless?"

"We must publish them ourselves," said Doris, with energy, "and I always supposed that you intended to do so. The poems are not worthless; they will be valued by all

your friends, and we must not disappoint them. For my sake, dear Mrs. Aspen, to release me from my promise, you must let one edition of them be printed."

Mrs. Aspen sat musing. The proposal freed her from many difficulties; and would at least save her from humiliation, if it did not cover her with glory. Down at Thornbury, where many copies would be sold to her acquaintances, it would not be known that the London publishers had rejected her poems. But she shrank from the diminution to her own lofty self-esteem which was involved in following this course, until the thought came into her mind that Doris and Paul would be released from their promise only by the publication of the "Monkmoor Roundelays." She smiled upon Doris's earnest face with an air of penetration and sagacity.

"So!" she said, "my Doris must be set free; and as the publishers will not do it, knowing nothing of the event depending

upon their decision, I must fain pocket my pride, and pay a heavy tax upon my folly. Nothing else should have prevailed upon me. My love, tell me, will you be glad for me to consent to your plan? Have you set your heart upon its being done?"

"I shall be very glad," replied Doris, flushing under Mrs. Aspen's significant gaze. "It is good of you to consent. We will not condescend to send our manuscript to any more publishers; but we will set about the work ourselves, and at once."

This question being settled Mrs. Aspen turned again with interest and pleasure to her rejected poems; and when, in the course of two or three weeks, the first proof-sheets were brought for her revision, she forgot her disappointment in the exultation of seeing them at last printed in fair and legible type. Doris gently drew a veil of oblivion over the terms of her success, and fanned the glow in the aged and bereaved heart into a sunny lustre, until the poetess moved about the

narrow apartments with her former lofty step, and airy spirits. At Doris's earnest entreaty she sent for the portrait, and placed it in the hands of an eminent engraver to form the frontispiece ; then they both threw themselves into their literary enterprise, with an abandonment of every other interest.

Why did Doris never tell how her pulses throbbed, and how the tightening veins in her temples burned as if a fiery finger were tracking out their course, and how her nerves were unstrung and trembling with overwrought excitement ? At night instead of refreshing sleep visiting her, she entered upon strange scenes of tropical grandeur, with the waving of palm-trees overhead, and the intricate mazes of the jungle hemming her in, while a torrid sun beat down upon her, and the dying voice of Rufus afar off in the inextricable bewilderment called to her for her aid. It had been so, though in a less degree, at the Vicarage, but there Paul's presence kept her silent ; and here, so much

seemed to depend upon her bearing up, and not yielding to sickness. She fought bravely with the oppression of disease ; and restless until her work was completed, she promised herself perfect repose, when the last drawing was finished, and the last proof corrected.

It was late in March when she carried the last sheets to the office herself ; and the keen east wind was blowing agreeably upon her burning forehead. She was conducted to the publisher's private room immediately, as one familiar with the place ; and entering, with her name audibly pronounced, both Mr. Serle, and a visitor engaged in close conversation with him, started at the announcement, and turned to meet her with something like a guilty consciousness upon their faces. Doris herself, after glancing from one to the other, reeled giddily to a chair, and, sinking into it, moved her pale lips, but without uttering a word.

“Doris,” said the stranger, stroking a black moustache daintily with one finger, “this is

tricky of you. It is unworthy of you, my dear girl. My father's valuable manuscripts belong to me, and ought not to be disposed of without my consent. If you could produce a single line to authorize you in this very discreditable procedure, I would yield them to you at once. But as it is I cannot. Upon my soul and honour I cannot!"

"I have worked at them for a whole year," murmured Doris, in a tone of entreaty to Mr. Serle.

"You really should not have done so," replied the stranger, with a smile. "I recommended you as a brother to take life easily, and do no more work than you could help. You women are such dear, foolish little souls. I see you have worn yourself to a shadow with that and the old lady's poetry. Ah! Doris, you could tell me about her at Christmas, but you never breathed a syllable about this. If you had only entrusted me with those valuable papers, I should have saved you all this labour, and you would now

have been in a better state of preservation."

"You could have done nothing with them," cried Doris, eagerly, "the notes are so scattered, you could not have arranged them. It was only I who had the patience for it. Mr. Serle, I will show them to you, and you shall judge. They are scribbled on scraps of paper; on fly-leaves of books; in the margin of pages; on palm-leaves so brown and withered you can scarcely trace a word; and all of them are without date or arrangement. Only I could have done it, but I knew my father's ways so well. Oh! I have been obliged to have such unwearied patience I have given whole hours of my nights to finish this work, and now is he to have all the benefit of it?"

"It is an awkward business," replied Mr. Serle. "Mr. Arnold tells me he saw the advertisement of his father's posthumous work only yesterday, and came up to town at once to see me about it."

Doris sat silent for a few minutes in profound consideration, while her brother strolled to the window, and looked out into the street, humming a merry air.

“George,” she said, following him, and laying her hand upon his arm, while he met her imploring gaze with a smile glittering in his dark eyes; “dear George, if this money were to be spent by you in any wise, or even lawful manner, I would say nothing about my own claims, or my work. I shall be provided for, and as long as my health lasts I can maintain myself. But you cannot tell me that you have changed your mode of life yet. You will only squander it as you have squandered all the rest. Tell me upon your honour as a man that you are going to use it in any way that our father would approve, and I will give it up to you at once.”

George Arnold finished humming his tune, with his eyes fixed mockingly upon Doris, until she withdrew her hand, and returned to the hearth where Mr. Serle stood

listening attentively to her appeal to her brother.

“There must be some law for a case like this,” she said, in a tone of decision, steady and calm enough. “I will maintain my own rights against him this time. What would be done if I employed a lawyer? My father died without a will, and George and I shared his personal property. I have nobody’s counsel to ask about it except yours.”

“My dear,” replied the publisher, who had known Doris from her childhood; “this brother of yours has been threatening me with demanding a larger sum for the copyright than that which you agreed to receive from us. No doubt he supposes that, as the manuscript is in the press, is already printed in fact, we are at his mercy, if he can only establish his claims.”

Doris stamped her foot impatiently, and flung back her hand with a gesture of anger and renunciation; but she did not turn her

eyes to the smiling mockery of her brother's face.

"The young man is mistaken," continued Mr. Serle. "The case would be tried before the Court of Equity; I should have no trouble in proving that the sum I pay you for the Journal is a fair one, and in just proportion to Lieutenant Arnold's other receipts. We shall be safe. But you will lose a portion of your well-earned money. Half of it will belong to you by right; and the Court will award to you a farther share in remuneration of your toil. Perhaps a fourth of the amount will be accorded to your brother, with his own costs to pay. I will see that your expenses are small."

"Upon my honour I should like to try it," exclaimed George Arnold, "it would help to sell the book, and be better than advertising. Doris and I would figure pleasantly in court. What is the Court of Equity like? Would there be any interesting counsellor in it? And would there be any chance for Doris?"

I would not care about losing my cause, if it were an advantage to my sister in that line."

Both his voice and laugh were so pleasant that a smile stole over the grave face of Mr. Serle in spite of himself; and Doris turned once more to her brother, with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, George," she said, "your voice is so like my father's! We might still be so happy together, if you would be different. You hear what Mr. Serle says; perhaps only a fourth of the money will be allotted to you, if you drive me to go to law about it. If you will only settle it quietly, without making our affairs public, I will give up the half to you, and count my work as nothing. Be content, and take half from me quietly."

"He ought to be content, the idle scoundrel!" muttered Mr. Serle between his teeth; while George Arnold, in his turn, assumed an air of profound and protracted deliberation, and Doris waited with flitting colour

and trembling limbs during some minutes of unbroken silence.

“Doris,” he said, eyeing her keenly; “have you no concealed motive for wishing to keep your connection with me out of sight? You have not told your new friends that you have a scape-grace brother?”

“I have not,” she answered, raising her throbbing head and dizzy eyes with difficulty. “I shall own you as my brother to no one, unless your conduct alters very greatly. George, my father forbade you to bear the name you dishonoured. I shall own you nowhere, and to no one.”

He curled his moustache again daintily, with no aspect of anger or surprise at the vehemence of her reply.

“It is hard,” he said, “that I should have but one sister, and she should renounce me so determinately. Well, I will make a sacrifice for you. I am not convinced that the law would give you any portion of the sum for my father’s copyright, as I am his sole

heir. But I will not be as hard with you, Doris, as you are with me. We were little children together once, and I cannot forget that. If I can have the money immediately, I will forego any further claim, and leave the transaction of the business between you and Mr. Serle. But I shall always consider myself badly treated by you, that you should have kept the possession of those papers a secret from me. There was something tricky about it; unworthy of the daughter of Sydney Arnold."

His airy and mocking manner was transformed into one of pathetic remonstrance, with a lurking irony underlying every tone and glance. But Doris made him no answer. She was resting her heavy head upon her hands; and his words began to sound far off and indistinct in her ears. A conversation followed between him and Mr. Serle, to which she endeavoured to give her wandering attention; but odd and incoherent thoughts were flitting rapidly through her aching brain, and

while she was yet conscious of the confusion there, she maintained a miserable silence, lest her indisposition should betray itself. It was not through the streets of London that she rambled homewards, but through the mazy jungles of the wilderness, with the fevered breath of the simoom burning upon her parched face. But at last she saw vaguely the frightened face of Mrs. Aspen bending over her, when she was lying as she believed upon the sandy banks of a molten stream flowing past her with scorching heat. With a violent effort upon her power of coherent speech she cried, "Do not send for Paul;" and the last gleam of consciousness faded.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. MARGRAF very seldom ventured to visit Paul's library, when he was once fairly settled at his studies. Harriet Crofton never failed to find some excuse for invading its sacred seclusion, whenever she called at Fairfield; but a guest may take more licence than a sister, and Paul generally tolerated her intrusions with grave philosophy. He felt so safe in the tacit embargo, which secured him from every unseasonable interruption from Mrs. Margraf, that he was idly lounging back in his chair, and dreamily gazing upwards to the portrait of Doris, above the hearth-place, when the rustle of a silken gown close behind him gave the first notice of another presence.

"I did tap, Paul," said Mrs. Margraf, apologetically, "but as you never answered

me, I was afraid you might be gone out. Here is a telegraphic message from London."

Telegrams were of rare occurrence to Paul, and he seized the envelope she held out to him with eager curiosity; but his face changed into deep concern as he read the enclosed message.

"'From Mrs. Aspen,'" he read, aloud. "'Doris is ill; delirious. She does not know me. What am I to do? I am alone, and do not know any physician.' Whatever is to be done now, Sophia?"

Paul had so long withdrawn himself from the ordinary current of life, that he felt helpless before any emergency. Mrs. Aspen had sent the briefest of messages, the bare outline of the calamity that had befallen her in London, for the calamity was greater to her than to Doris, who now lay insensible to all outward affairs. Never had Mrs. Aspen felt so forlorn as when she sat beside Doris's bed, listening to the faint, incoherent mutterings of her fevered lips. She could not believe

that Doris knew what she was saying when she uttered her imploring cry that Paul should not be sent for. She felt terribly alone in the overgrown Babel, whither she had been drifted in her old age, far away from the rustic repose and dignity in which she had lived hitherto. Her distrust of the sharp, shrewd strangers about her, made her reluctant to call in any medical help ; and in this extremity of her distress, she wrote the short, bare telegram to Paul, with a certainty of conviction that he would start off by the next train. In the course of a few hours, perhaps less than the time she would need to assure herself of the skill of a strange physician, he would be with her and Doris, managing everything for them, and taking the life which ought to be dearest and most precious to him under his own professional care. If she could have seen the blank and bewildered air with which Paul appealed to Mrs. Margraf, her heart would have sunk within her.

“Doris ill!” cried Mrs. Margraf; “do, Paul? Why you must go to London yourself at once.”

There was a shade too little of surprise, and too much readiness in Mrs. Margraf's answer. She had so frequently contemplated every circumstance that might arise in the position in which Paul and Doris stood to one another, and she had grown of late so desirous to further a marriage which at first appeared an impossibility, that the chance of Doris being ill, and Paul called upon to take her under his professional care, was no new idea to her active brain. It had been a great disappointment to her that he had not accompanied Mrs. Aspen to London; and several times she had urged some plausible reasons for him to follow them; and thus with a promptitude which at once jarred upon his mind, she pronounced the immediate necessity for his journey thither.

“I do not see what good I can do,” said Paul, hesitatingly. “Doris said positively

that my escort would be repugnant to her. If she is well enough to know me, my attendance would annoy her, and if she be delirious it might even be dangerous. No ; I will telegraph to Martin—he lives close at hand—and when he has seen her he will send me his opinion.”

“But you should go for Aunt Aspen’s sake,” urged Mrs. Margraf. “Oh, Paul ! reflect ! You do not think of what you are doing. She will be grieved and offended if you remain here while she is in such great trouble. What is it that makes you so reluctant to leave home for a few days ? Surely, surely, it cannot be—”

Mrs. Margraf paused abruptly, with a look of apprehension, for in Paul’s eyes there was a gleam before which she quailed. He replied in very quiet tones.

“The simple truth is that I promised Doris neither to accompany her nor follow her to London. It is enough that we are deceiving all my friends, and she resented the idea of

acting the lie before her own. If Mrs. Aspen is offended, it is only one of the more trifling consequences of your own plot, Sophia."

"What could be done?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands with an expression of real regret. "I believed it to be for the best; and it might all be right yet, if— Oh, Paul! Doris is a very good, gentle, amiable creature. If you ever thought of marrying—"

Paul Lockley sprang to his feet, and without a word to his sister, strode out of the room, leaving her in full possession of his solitude. She heard his voice in the court below ordering his horse to be saddled instantly, and in a few minutes she saw him riding at a furious pace in the direction of Thornbury. He felt more wrathful than he had done for years, and the perplexity of his position had no tendency to calm him. He had a kindly, almost affectionate, sentiment for Doris, which would have prompted him, under other circumstances, to hasten at once to London; and it chafed him to be compelled

to act with greater indifference than he felt. He despatched an urgent message to Dr. Martin ; and in order to save a post he wrote from Thornbury to Mrs. Aspen, expressing his extreme concern in rather measured and formal terms, and assuring her that the physician, to whom he had telegraphed possessed skill and kindness, to which he could trust Doris more securely than upon his own.

Mrs. Aspen was watching in Doris's darkened room, counting the slow and tedious hours that must elapse before Paul's arrival, when a servant brought the welcome intelligence that a strange gentleman desired to see her. Mrs. Aspen descended to the sitting-room in glad haste, wondering how Paul could have reached them already, and smiling in the midst of her depression at the speed with which a lover's fears could bring him. But it was indeed a stranger who advanced to meet her as she entered the room. He told her that he had brought an introduction from Dr. Lockley in the form of a telegram which he

had received a short time before ; and he placed it in her trembling hands, though she could scarcely read it for the tears that swam in her eyes. For it was a chilling disappointment ; and her shaken spirits sank again into the lowest despondency.

“ Sir,” she said, in a faltering tone, “ I expected Dr. Lockley to come up from the country himself. This young lady is to me as a daughter, and she is betrothed to my nephew, Paul Lockley. I fully expected that he would come to our help at once.”

“ No doubt he is coming,” replied the physician ; “ he knew that he should be delayed for some hours, and every minute may be of consequence to the young lady. The fact that he has telegraphed to me to hasten at once to see her is a proof of his anxiety, rather than an intimation that he is not coming himself. I am to reply immediately ; and he will no doubt come by the night train.”

It seemed highly probable and quite satis-

factory. Dr. Martin saw Doris, who was partially conscious, and uttered several incoherent petitions that no one should send for Paul. He pronounced her seriously threatened with brain fever, and offered to procure a nurse for her ; an offer which Mrs. Aspen rejected with a rural horror of town-nurses. It was a mournful night for the poetess. She would not leave the side of the delirious girl, though her own trustworthy servant begged to have the charge of her. Now that there was a danger of losing Doris it seemed as if she had never prized her enough ; and her thoughts, thoughts that would not take any poetic shape, made her too wakeful to suffer the most cunning approach of sleep. She was also expecting the arrival of Paul ; and through all the dreary hours she was listening for the sound of wheels, and the cautious ring of the bell, which would announce him. Never had she waited and watched for any one in so much suspense ; but the night wore on, and many wheels rattled along the street

without stopping, causing Doris to moan and start painfully, and the grey dawn stole in, and still Paul came not. At last Paul's letter was put into her hand, and she read its formal and constrained sentences beside the sick-bed of her adopted child, to whose help he was not coming. Mrs. Aspen laid her face upon the pillow where the restless head had been tossing to and fro all night, and burst into an agony of tears.

Another mournful day, followed by a sleepless night, with Doris wild and frenzied with delirium, and compelled to have unknown nurses about her, who sneered a little at the dignified old lady, and intimated plainly that she would be better out of the way. But Mrs. Aspen distrusted them too much to commit her Doris to their mercy; and only for short and rare intervals, when her own maid promised solemnly not to quit the room for an instant, would she try to take the rest and refreshment she needed. The second dawn of her vigil found Clarissa Aspen,

greyer, older, more worn and wrinkled than the sun had ever seen her face before. She scarcely knew the grim and sallow countenance in her mirror, and despite all her grief the thought flashed across her mind that surely Mr. Vale himself would not recognise her. She fancied him in the sunny quietness of his secluded vicarage, with the martins shrieking round the belfry, and the church clock chiming the placid hours. Every one seemed to have deserted her and Doris in their direst extremity; all of them so peaceful and contented in their country-homes that even their calamity could not draw them into the mighty vortex of London, which had dragged her and Doris into its terrible whirlpool. She was heart-sick for the sight of a familiar face; and her own looked back upon her from the glass with a strange, unnatural aspect, which added to her sense of loneliness.

She had seated herself, without appetite, at the breakfast-table, when there came a low,

cautious ring of the house-bell, so gentle and muffled, that only the unusual tension of her nerves made it audible to her ear. She heard a swift but quiet step through the hall, and the open door revealed the pale face, and tender, anxious gaze of Rufus, who stood irresolute with an unspoken question upon his lips. It was a sudden consolation to see one whose care and love for Doris were like her own. When the boy seized her hand in his unconscious grip, and looked at her with eyes of apprehension, and with lips that could not utter the words which faltered upon them, she took him into her arms, crying, "God bless you, Rufus! Nobody else has come. We are alone, Doris and I; but you will take care of us. You will take care of Doris."

"I started as soon as I heard of it," he answered. "I was here at eleven last night; but Dr. Martin would not let me disturb you. But why is not Paul here? How is it, aunt Aspen?"

"I cannot tell," she replied, with an accent

of indignation. "It is that Delilah, Harriet Crofton! Rufus, Paul does not love Doris as she deserves."

Rufus sighed heavily. From the moment he had opened his sister's letter the evening before, which contained the intelligence of Doris's illness, and suggested to him that there would be no harm in his running up to London; Mrs. Margraf judging it better that he should go than that Mrs. Aspen should be left unattended; no thought but of Doris had entered his preoccupied mind. Now there was forced back upon him the unwelcome suspicion that Paul did not prize the treasure he had won. Yet he said nothing which could increase Mrs. Aspen's displeasure; and presently the troubling thoughts were absorbed in the single idea that he was under the same roof as Doris, and Doris was ill, dangerously ill. A little attic was prepared for him, upon his assuring Mrs. Aspen that nothing could persuade him to leave the house until all danger was over. Once during the day, he

stood on the threshold of the sick room, and caught a glimpse of the dishevelled golden hair and wild face of his darling, and heard her voice speaking of him and Paul in disconnected sentences. He turned away almost heart-broken. Sitting for a long time motionless, his face buried upon his arms which rested on the table before him; he called up every image of Doris imprinted upon his memory during the time he had loved her; until this last of a fevered, frantic, delirious sufferer, with no friends near her, except his aged aunt, and himself, unskilled and useless.

CHAPTER VIII.



It was a source of exceeding gratification to Harriet Crofton to find that Paul did not hurry away to London at the first news of Doris's illness. Ascribing it altogether to the power of her own attractions, she redoubled her efforts to captivate him. In his dreamy, abstracted fashion, he was beginning to spend a good deal of his time with her, to pay her many flattering attentions, and it became a serious thought with her how she could strengthen most firmly the power she had over him. The little real love her heart was capable of feeling had been bestowed upon Paul, in the early days of struggle in his profession; and if he had then held the position that was now his, she would never have been tempted to inconstancy. She had

married Richard Crofton solely on the prudential grounds of his better circumstances ; but the lapse of years and the changes of fortune had completely reversed their condition. Paul had developed, too, into a handsome man ; a finer and more distinguished-looking personage than the slender stripling, the awkward and easily embarrassed young doctor, who was too much concerned about making his way in the world, to be quite at ease with himself, or with those about him. Lockley of Fairfield, with his grave composure, his grand impassibility, and scholarly abstractedness, was a very different and superior being to the hurried, anxious, over-wrought, and toil-worn Lockley of Thornbury, the junior partner of an elder physician, whose career depended solely upon his own abilities. Harriet began to marvel at the mistake she had committed in preferring Richard Crofton to Paul. Being incapable, as most of us are, of recalling the past with all its minute and determining circumstances,

she regarded herself as having been entrapped and betrayed into taking a false step.

Her manner towards Paul changed insensibly and unconsciously to herself. It deepened in impassioned earnestness; the coldness of the merely superficial court she had paid to him when actuated by the wish to injure or displace Doris, passed into a secret and dangerous fever of spirit; she centred all her thoughts upon the old love that had bound them to one another, and which the present scenes, so long unvisited, recalled most vividly to her memory. Now and then, on the bright spring mornings, as she rambled about out of doors; for within she was restless and unquiet unless some amusement was going on; it appeared to her as though her youth had returned to her, and once more she possessed the right of choice between Richard Crofton and Paul Lockley. She knew them both now; the one a spendthrift, querulous in temper, broken down in health, without home or reputation; the other a

man of mark, held in high esteem, and with a firm position in the county, both as a land-owner, and a scholar ; one to be proud of if she heard herself pointed out as his wife. She indulged in long reveries, in which she reversed the decision of her girlhood, and repulsed with scorn the treacherous love of Paul's trusted friend. But there was an increasingly cruel pang in awaking, to find that it was nothing but a dream.

Paul had long ceased to care, even for retribution to follow the treachery practised upon him ; he felt so unmoved in the presence of his old love, that no idea of any feeling on her part occurred to his occupied mind. It amused him at times to watch her play her little artillery of charms upon other men, and even upon himself, and the easy pleasantry with which he met them deceived her. He certainly liked her most when she was grave and listening to him ; when she rebuked Tom Fanshawe on his account, or left the card-table or the dance upon his

entrance, to sit at his side, and with sweetly modulated tones, question him concerning his studies ; or lament to him, with melancholy glances from her lustrous eyes, that her own existence was empty and worthless, being so far apart from his pursuits. He was as susceptible as most other men to the subtle flattery of a beautiful woman, which became more dangerous as she grew more earnest. She had changed imperceptibly her mode of attracting him. It was no longer the gay or sentimental coquette who planned easily discovered snares to entrap him ; but it was a thoughtful, diffident woman, entering heartily into his dearest interests and studies, and adding to them the zest of a delicate sympathy. Doris could have supplied this vaguely felt need better than Harriet, as she possessed more natural susceptibility of delight in the things which pleased him most ; but she had kept herself shyly aloof from him ; the more shy and reserved because of the unfortunate contract existing between them. As soon as

Paul heard that Rufus was in London ; intelligence that excited a slight ripple of vexation upon the calm current of his emotions ; he decided peremptorily that his attendance also would produce a scene of comedy and folly. Yet he was dissatisfied with himself, and disquieted about Doris. Dr. Martin's reports of her illness were alarming and interesting ; and he found it impossible to settle down peacefully in his library, with her meek, sad face reproaching him for his procrastination. He did not contemplate her death for a single instant, for if the idea flashed across him, he dismissed it with an undefined repugnance ; but he was annoyed that in spite of Doris's prohibition he had not at the first seized his right to be near at hand, and to note every precarious fluctuation of the fever ; he fretted himself with the conviction that Mrs. Aspen was blaming him, not unjustly, for his apparent coldness and unconcern. It was like deserting from a battle-field when the conflict was hottest ; and his pro-

fessional instincts, not yet extirpated, pricked him with some sharp pangs. He spent many of his unoccupied hours at the Priory, foaming and chafing at the restraint laid upon him. It was with a positive sense of relief that one morning, in addition to the daily bulletin from Dr. Martin, he received a telegraphic message from Rufus, imploring him to hasten up to London at once. Doris was in the greatest danger, and he could not be satisfied with any other opinion than his.

Paul was at the Priory when the messenger was sent over to him from Fairfield in hot haste. Everyone stood round him waiting breathlessly for his first words, as his eye ran rapidly over the sentences. The look of bitter regret upon his face, and the impetuosity with which he sprang to his feet sent a chill of jealousy through Harriet Crofton's heart.

“Doris is dangerously ill—dying!” he cried. “Fool! to have stayed away so long. I shall be too late; too late, perhaps.”

Emma melted into tears in a moment ; into a light, elegant shower of tears, that were not unbecoming to her blue eyes, which she lifted up to Tom Fanshawe, as if seeking some consolation from him ; but Tom was too deeply agitated to notice her emotion. It was remarkable how pale and frightened he looked for a minute ; and how promptly he rang the bell, with a peal that rang through the house.

“There’s a train starting in forty minutes,” he exclaimed ; “we’ll catch it, Lockley, if Crofton has a horse with any muscle in him. I knew little Doris Arnold once. Good heavens! sir, you ought to have been there before this.”

He spoke in a tone of indignant energy that made Paul wince ; but without waiting for an answer to his noisy summons, he darted out of the room to the stable-yard in the old ruins. There was a feeling of compunction in Harriet’s heart, as she witnessed Paul’s unconcealed regret ; yet as he loitered for

a minute or two, with an air of perplexity and indecision; she could not withstand the desire to keep him away from Doris still.

“It will be of no use if she is dying,” she said softly, “and it will be a great sorrow to you. It will be a great sorrow to you?” she added, in a questioning tone.

“Very great,” he replied, with a sudden feeling that he hardly knew how great his sorrow would be.

“They told me,” she continued, dropping her eyes before his, “that once, after a great sorrow, your own life was despaired of. Don’t go, Paul. Let Sophia go. If it were so dreadful a shock as to endanger your life again, what would become of me?”

“Nay,” answered Paul, “a man does not suffer like that twice in his life. I ought to have been in London long ago; and now I must go in readiness for any event. You need not be afraid for me, Harriet; I am no young lover now.”

His tone was mournful, for he was thinking of the agony and despair which he had borne long years since, and which Rufus might now be suffering. Once again she raised her eyes to his face with a tender and impassioned glance ; but Paul was looking at his watch, and it fell harmlessly upon him.

“But you love Doris ?” she urged, in a low voice.

“Yes !” he said, “yes ! But a man of my age does not care to talk much of his love. Doris is dear to me, Harriet.”

She shivered a little, and withdrew her hand from his arm, where it had rested unnoticed. Paul had scarcely looked at her while she was speaking her troubling words ; words which had stirred her own heart to its shallow depth. It was evident his thoughts were far away, with this new, last love of his, whom yet he had left ill and solitary among strangers. She could not understand him ; his cold negligence up to this time ; the restless remorse stamped upon his features, and

expressed by his impatient departure. She was almost too late in running downstairs after him to bid him farewell, as he sprang into the dog-cart beside Tom Fanshawe, and drove off at a headlong pace towards Thornbury.

The rapid drive brought them to the station a few moments too soon ; and to Paul's uncontrollable surprise, Tom Fanshawe thus addressed him :

“By Jove ! sir, if I were little Doris Arnold's brother, I should be apt to call you to account for your conduct to her. All Thornbury is ringing with it. It's not much for a fellow like me, a scapegrace, and all that sort of thing, to play fast and loose, and carry on a little flirtation now and then with a married woman. But mark you, Dr. Lockley, if a good girl like Doris had promised to be my wife, I should not leave her to die in London, while I dangled after an arrant coquette like the party down yonder. I'm not squeamish ; but even I should not do that. There's your

train, sir ; I hope to heaven you'll not find yourself too late."

There was neither time nor quiet for a reply ; and as Tom Fanshawe seized Paul's hand and shook it heartily, the latter seated himself in the carriage with less resentment than amazement. It was food for thought. As he sat silent, with his hat drawn over his face and his eyes closed, he took a mental survey, from an outside point of view, of the position in which he stood in the sight of his neighbours. It was not agreeable. There was sufficient appearance of evil to afford a fine piece of scandal to the idle circles of Thornbury. Every one knew of Doris Arnold's illness ; and that, instead of hastening, with his medical skill, to be near her in the event of any danger, he had loitered, with unaccountable negligence, at home ; or dallied about the Priory, where the subject of the old gossip was dwelling. He, an honourable man, had apparently been acting a dishonourable and blameworthy part. Tom

Fanshawe's censure was but the voice of the people passing sentence upon his conduct. He wondered at himself for letting scruples light as air deter him from the line of action he would have pursued, had he and Doris held the ordinary relations of mere friendly acquaintanceship ; and as the tedious hours of his long journey spent themselves, he tortured himself with the dread lest upon his arrival he should indeed find himself too late.

He had not yet quite done with the voice of the public. As he sprang, impatient and apprehensive, from the cab which conveyed him to Mr. Aspen's residence, his arm was caught in a man's strong grasp. Looking round and down, his eyes fell upon the haggard face of Robert Atcherley, who was gazing up to him with a vindictive glare, deepening into hatred. The day was closing, and the early dusk of the city was illuminated by the lamps in the street ; but Paul felt, rather than saw the fierce despondency of the artist's gaze.

“She is sleeping,” he said, huskily, “and you shall make no sound to disturb her. It is her last chance. Rufus has had this tan laid down to deaden every noise of wheels. It is Rufus who has been watching day by day within ; while I have kept watch without. Paul Lockley, what is it that you mean? If you did not love her, why could you not leave her—not for me—I could not presume to hope she would care for a poor deformed wretch like me—but why did you not leave her for Rufus, whose very life is bound up in her? She may be dying, and it is he who sits within there, hovering between hope and despair ; while you who have knowledge and skill, and ought to have—good heaven ! *ought* to have—a love that would snatch her back from the very grave itself, tarry at home in dalliance with that Jezabel. What is it that you mean ?”

“Atcherley, my dear fellow,” said Paul gently, “Heaven knows I never once suspected that you loved Doris ! But I tell you,

if I could sacrifice ten years of my life ; and that is a great deal for a man to say at my age ; I would give them gladly for the last ten days to return. I have been a fool, Atcherley ; a fool all my life where women are concerned. Doris does not love Rufus ; or the boy's happiness is dearer to me than my own. Let me pass in now ; I am anxious to ascertain what hope there is for us."

"Hope!" repeated Atcherley, with a groan. "Well, go in, Dr. Lockley, but let me know as soon as possible. Remember I am staying out here until the crisis is past."

He looked round at the dull, half-lighted street, at the drizzling rain, which fell listlessly and continuously ; and noticing it for the first time, he drew his hand down his sleeve, which had long been wet through. Paul saw the action, and as the door was opened, called to him as he moved on a few paces along the watery pavement.

"Come in with me, Atcherley," he said ; "you will be more sure of hearing at once

than if you stay without here. Come, you can at least bear Rufus company ; we shall know the worst in a few hours at the utmost."

They entered together, and passed through the hall to the room where Rufus was alert for every sound, shuddering whenever a careless footstep passed by, or the shrill whistle of an errand-boy hissed through the quiet street. His face was pallid with prolonged unrest ; and the livid circles under his eyes told their tale of sleeplessness and weeping. He looked up impatiently when the door opened. As Paul appeared he sprang to meet him, and threw his arms round his neck with an abandonment of sorrow ; and resting his head upon his shoulder, as he had often done in his boyhood, he sobbed for a minute or two uncontrollably. Then drawing himself away with a flush of shame, and turning his quivering face from their view, he tried to speak in a calm and steady voice.

"You ought to have been here before,

Paul," he said, "there is very little hope now. She has been asking for you, Paul; and for me — for me, my darling, my love."

His voice broke down, and again Rufus bowed his head, and sobbed heavily, with such deep-drawn, convulsive sighs, that Paul was alarmed for him. He laid his hand tenderly upon his shoulder.

"Rufus, my boy," he said, "Rufus, it must be as God wills; and that is always best."

"You can talk of God's will," he murmured, amid his sobs, "but you never loved her as I do, Paul. I cannot lose her altogether. I could bear to see her live and be happy as your wife; but she must not die. If you had been here, you might have saved her."

He started as if stung to frenzy at the remembrance, and paced to and fro in the room, with vehement steps and gestures, taking no heed of Paul, who stood aside

looking anxiously and sorrowfully upon the boy's passion of suffering.

"If she dies," he cried, "it will be you who have killed her, and I shall never bear to see your face again. I must leave England. Till the hour of my death I shall believe that you might have saved her life if you would. You might have come for my sake, if not for her's and your own. And she spoke of you and me just before she fell asleep. I feel mad when I think that you were not here."

"Rufus," exclaimed Paul, "when I see you thus, and hear your reproaches, "I would give my life for hers."

He spoke so sadly, with such unutterable regret and remorse in his manner, that Rufus paused and looked earnestly into his troubled face. Paul stretched out his hands to him, and the boy clasped them with a strong, despairing grasp, and gazed pitifully and beseechingly into his brother's eyes.

"Forgive me, Paul," he said, "but I have

been accusing you to myself ; you seemed false-hearted and treacherous. It has been a wretched time for us here ; and you can do nothing for Doris now. You are too late."

Rufus uttered the last words hopelessly, and sank down into his chair with an air of complete exhaustion. Then followed a night of tedious waiting, during which Paul stole noiselessly from time to time to the chamber where Mrs. Aspen watched in speechless solicitude the death-like face of the sleeping girl. The opportunity for trying the resources of his skill was past ; and as Mrs. Aspen averted her eyes from him, and answered only by a mute shake of her head to his whispered entreaties that he might relieve her at her fatiguing post, he returned to the room where Rufus and Robert Atcherley kept their vigil in silence as unbroken as in the chamber of Doris's profound slumber.

"The night was a long one : to which it

was the most dreary it would be impossible to say. But as the dawn came, grey and cold, with tardy light as if reluctant to awaken the countless sleepers of the great city, they heard a hurried step cross the floor above, and Mrs. Aspen's voice calling loudly in an accent of fear, for Paul. The two who were left looked at one another in unutterable dread, not daring to speak any word that should carry his despair to the heart of the other; until the door opened, and Paul appeared, with an expression of almost uncontrollable agitation upon his grave face.

"Rufus, my boy," he said, huskily, and laying his arm round his young brother's shoulders, "Doris will live."

The boy reeled for an instant, and stretched out his hands blindly as if for some prop to stand by; then with a long, low cry, hushed lest it should reach the ears of Doris, he fell forward, fainting, upon Paul's breast.

CHAPTER IX.

DORIS'S second slumber, following her death-like sleep, lasted many hours ; but she awoke again at last, and lay, very still and helpless, with her wasted hand lying in Paul's clasp, as his finger's felt the feeble pulse which was beating calmly within her transparent veins. She looked quiet and peaceful ; and only the long eyelashes lying upon her sunken cheeks fluttered a little, as Paul counted the throbs under his touch.

"I thought you would not come to me," she whispered, in a tone so low that he had to bend over her to catch the faint utterance ; and a new sense of perplexity stole over him.

"But I am here, Doris," he answered, glancing at the cold and stern face of Mrs.

Aspen, who regarded him with a look of rigid displeasure.

“I cannot tell why I thought you would not come,” continued Doris, with more energy, and opening her eyes for an instant with a glimmer of a smile upon her wan features; “you are so good, and kind, and clever; of course you would come. It was very foolish to think you would leave me here to die.”

“Very foolish!” he said, soothingly, pressing the little hand before releasing it from his hold, “and Rufus is here too. Poor Rufus! he could not stay away while you were so ill.”

“I saw Rufus,” she murmured, while the tears gathered slowly under her eyelashes, “but you I could never see. I tried to see you; I thought you must be here, and that there was a film before my eyes. There were strange people about me; but not you, Paul.”

“But I am here, my dear girl,” replied

Paul, taking her hand in his own again, with a novel and pleasurable sensation in listening to her slow and faint accents, and looking upon her languid face. But Mrs. Aspen's severe eyes were upon him, so drawing the curtain to shade the light from her pillow, he added in the soothing tones he could command readily, "you must be quiet now, Doris ; we must not talk to you any more at present."

Doris opened her eyes again with a smile, and a slight, delicate flush tinged her pallid cheeks, sending a sudden throb and tremor through Paul's frame, as he still lingered, looking down at her. Her lips moved in a scarcely audible whisper, and bending again over her, he answered the murmured words in the same quiet and reassuring voice ; "I will not leave you till we can take you home." Offering his arm to Mrs. Aspen, who rejected it with an unrelenting aspect, he followed her into an adjoining room.

Mrs. Aspen took the seat which Paul

brought for her with an air of aggrieved dignity ; while he stood opposite to her on the hearth, with the guise of a culprit, and with a hearty wish that the interview was over. He could easily anticipate the complaints and remonstrances, the pathetic lamentations she was about to express, and he was perfectly at a loss as to what answer or apology he could make ; the more so as his conscience upbraided him for the indecision that had kept him away, when his presence was so longed for in London. He was growing weary of the question as to what he meant by his conduct to Doris ; and he was becoming less decided in his reply to it to his own heart. There was something so sweet in the new spring of tenderness and compassion which had been touched by Doris's weakness, and the simplicity of the few sentences she had whispered, that he felt a vague wish that there could be some truth in the supposed relationship existing between them. What was the meaning of her faint

utterances? Was it possible that she was secretly cherishing for him feelings which might make a reality of their mutual fraud? But Paul's diffidence checked him at the very starting-point of this thought. He always had been a fool where women were concerned; but it would be the wildest folly to interpret Doris's half delivered words into a revelation of her concealed attachment to himself.

These reflections flitted rapidly through his mind, while Mrs. Aspen sat before him with her eyes fixed keenly and reproachfully upon his clouded face. She was so disappointed, so grieved, so neglected and offended that it was with difficulty she could address him with a courteous anger. It was incumbent upon her to maintain the dignity both of herself and Doris, who was like a daughter to her; but not less was Paul like a son, and it was he to whom John had entrusted her, and who had spoken into his dying ear the promise that he would regard her as a mother.

“ Paul Lockley,” she said at last, in a faltering voice, “ tell me frankly if you have any love for my Doris. I know that siren has employed every charm to entangle you again ; and woe befall the day when I suffered her to darken the doors of Monkmoor Priory. But I believed you to be a man of high honour and true principle, Paul.”

“ I assure you,” he interrupted, hastily, “ you and all the world are mistaken. Harriet Crofton is nothing to me. She is not even the woman I once loved, so completely is she changed as well as I. I am thankful she is Richard Crofton’s wife, and not mine. Why, aunt, who would compare your Doris with Harriet ? ”

The question was put with Mrs. Margraf’s skill, and half the anger fled from Mrs. Aspen’s countenance.

“ But then Paul, why——?” she resumed ; but he broke in again upon her remonstrance.

“ Do not ask me why at present,” he said. “ I cannot answer you satisfactorily. Did

not Doris herself dread having me sent for? Did she say nothing about it in the first stage of her illness, before she became delirious?"

He felt a secret hope that she might have been asking for him, and looking to him to save her from pain and danger; but Mrs. Aspen's reply extinguished it.

"Yes, Doris implored me not to send for you. But it is all a mystery to me. If you are her betrothed husband, you ought at least to have been in the house, as Rufus was, in readiness for any event. I daresay it is very correct, and I understand Doris perfectly. But you, Paul! You have not the hundredth part of the love that Rufus has for her."

"No," said Paul, with a deep sigh, "poor Rufus has made an idol of her. It would have been his death if she had not rallied."

"Then give her up to him," urged Mrs. Aspen. "Break off this engagement which hangs so loosely upon you. I will make Rufus my heir, after a due provision for poor

Emma ; and Doris, and he, and I will live again in the old Priory. I could be happy once more."

"I wish to heaven Doris would have him," cried Paul, with a sting of regret. "He is ten times more worthy of her than a poor blind bookworm like me. But I cannot comprehend women ; I cannot indeed," and he strode hastily away to the window, and gazed intently on the narrow space of sky above the roofs opposite, in which the first star of the evening was glimmering feebly in the sunset light. It was twenty-four hours since he had found Robert Atcherley watching without, and Rufus within ; while the girl they both loved so ardently was not to be won by the devotion of either.

"No, Doris does not love him," said Mrs. Aspen. "She has given her heart to you. Who could doubt it after seeing and hearing her just now ? And it is useless to form plans and wishes, which leave that out of sight. But, dear Paul, how is it you care

so little for her, when she is your promised wife? I have been building upon living in your home, the witness of your mutual happiness. I do not say that I should leave the Priory to you, when you already possess Fairfield; and yet I should like to think of my Doris growing old as I have done within the shelter of the old walls, for she has a poet's heart and fancy. Oh, Paul! break off altogether with Harriet Crofton, and return to your attachment for my Doris."

Paul had heard but indistinctly since the first few words, which had wafted his thoughts away to a pleasant vision of Fairfield, with a fair, studious, young wife, flitting softly about his library, or bending with him over the same pages in absorbed silence. There would be a dainty luxury added to his scholarly retirement, if the low, sweet voice of Doris read his favourite authors, and her small, white hand diligently copied out his own writings. He would like to feel her tranquil and modest presence, marking his progress,

and ever ready to exult with him, or to soothe the despondency of his intellectual fluctuations. If there lived a student's wife in the world, it was the girl, who was lying helpless and faint in the next room, with the sound of his soothing words the last that had been breathed into her ears; and his touch the last that had clasped her transparent hand. Above all if Doris loved him, it would be cruel to break her heart.

It was an undisturbed night to him; but not to Robert Atcherley, who was journeying homewards to his blind mother, with alternate grief and gladness stirring in his heart. Mrs. Aspen trusted implicitly to the effect of her conversation with Paul, and went to sleep with a feeling of profound repose, and bright hope for the future. Paul had seen Doris again for a brief half-hour, and sat beside her talking of indifferent subjects, but with new tones and glances; when he left her he sank at once into a slumber of fatigue and exhaustion, yet with the pleasant thought

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

hovering through his mind that in the morning he should visit her again, and watch the flickering light come and go in her eyes. But Rufus, who had been weak and languid all day after his fainting fit, lay awake, praying for the health and happiness of his darling, with tears which only the night saw. The strain of excitement was over, and left him stranded on a lee shore of flat and heavy depression; a shipwrecked man, unable yet to render thanks for the stilling of the storm. It was Paul who had stepped in before him, and borne away all the triumph and delight of deliverance from an overwhelming sorrow.

Paul was staying at the house of his friend, Dr. Martin, whom he accompanied on his early visit to his patient, smiling with unwonted hilarity at his congratulations, and no longer shrinking from them, as from those of his acquaintances at Thornbury. Dr. Martin's report of Doris was satisfactory, and Paul sat down to breakfast with the keen appetite of a man well contented with himself and his

prospects. In Doris's room Mrs. Aspen was superintending the slender repast of the invalid; talking to her of Paul with a little amiable hypocrisy, representing his great anxiety, and rather describing the conduct of Rufus, but with his brother's name inserted instead of his. Doris's colour was stronger this morning; her blushes came more readily, but there were no smiles upon her face.

"Mrs. Aspen," she said, when her head was resting upon the pillow again, "I have been very delirious. Did I say anything that I should be ashamed of?"

"No, my love," she answered, tenderly, "nothing whatever. You said many things I did not understand; but not a word that you would not like Paul to hear; nothing but what was like yourself, Doris."

"Thank God!" she said. "Oh! I was so afraid when I felt my reason leaving me. But, Mrs. Aspen, I must not see Paul again. I was weak and foolish yesterday; but I cannot see him any more."

“Not see Paul!” ejaculated Mrs. Aspen.

“No,” she answered, fretfully. “I am not strong enough to bear it. I was silly yesterday, and asked him to stay; but it would make me ill again. I did not want him to come at all. Let him go back to Fairfield, and Rufus to Cambridge.”

“But, my dear Doris!” exclaimed Mrs. Aspen.

“Please don’t say any more,” she urged, raising her hand feebly to her purple-veined temples. “If I thought he was anywhere near I should soon lose my senses again. Tell him that I do not want to see him, at least until I am quite well again, and he must not stay any longer. Dear Mrs. Aspen, do make them both go away.”

She turned her face away, her eyes shut, and her lips resolutely closed, while Mrs. Aspen regarded her in consternation and dismay. Paul received his sentence of dismissal with a grim dissatisfaction; but he acquiesced in it at once. The only danger to

Doris now was the feverish fretting and irritation that might oppress her spirits, if her wishes were not complied with. It was a just retribution for his protracted absence. Yet she evidently believed that he had been with her through all the peril of her illness. It was, then, a convincing proof that her affection for him existed only in his own, and Mrs. Aspen's imaginations. He would return to his books, and bury himself among them ; the only existence he was fit for, and they the only companions whom he could comprehend.

He was not permitted to see Doris again, but she asked for Rufus to visit her. It was a blissfully troubled interview ; from which he went away with a white, spiritual face haunting him, and the lowest, faintest tones of the beloved voice echoing through his heart. They had said very little to one another ; but Doris had drawn his head down to hers with her weak hands, and whispered, " Kiss me, brother Rufus ! " and there had

been a frank and loving smile in her eyes, when he lifted up his face again, with an expression upon it that told how fully he was recompensed for all his suffering suspense. Down to Cambridge he went, with Paul in the same carriage, moody and dispirited; but they had little to say to one another. Only the hearty grasp of the hand with which they parted, testified to the affection that existed between them, after all the shocks of distrust which had shaken Rufus's regard for his elder and revered brother.

CHAPTER X.

HEALTH and strength were tardy in their return to the enervated frame of Doris. The delirium left behind it a weariness and weakness of brain, which subjected her to overwhelming attacks of melancholy, against which she seemed in vain to struggle. Both Lieutenant Arnold's posthumous works, and the Monkmoor Roundelays were fairly launched into the current of literature, and the former was making gallant way amid the favour of men of science, and of the adventure-loving public. The reviewers awarded it liberal and regretful praises; Mrs. Aspen gathered up all the laurels showered upon the grave of the ill-fated naturalist, and brought them to cheer and gladden the despondent heart of his daughter; but even these failed

to disperse the heavy gloom that oppressed her spirits. Her father's old friends rallied round her; but even the Editor of the *Athenæum*; a censor upon whom Mrs. Aspen looked with unmingled veneration, and who called occasionally to visit Doris by right of an old acquaintanceship; only roused her for a little while; and during a temporary absence of Mrs. Aspen succeeded in bringing a glimmering smile to her lips, and an arch light to her eyes. The same expression returned some days subsequently, and lingered upon her face for an hour or two, when the delighted poetess found three or four lines in the columns of the *Athenæum*, where the style and title of the "Monkmoor Roundelays" were favourably mentioned. She read them with a few natural tears that John could never glory in the fame she had won; and then she set her heart upon returning triumphantly to her native country, and her own people.

But to her profound astonishment and

chagrin, Mrs. Aspen discovered that Doris regarded their engagement at an end ; and declined to return either to the Vicarage at Ryton, or the Priory itself. She said, weeping bitterly, that she had not sufficient strength to go home with her, and that she was pining for the fresh, invigorating air of the sea. Mrs. Aspen assured her tenderly that she had only been waiting to hear her express some choice, and that she was willing to accompany her at once to the seaside, and remain there as long as the sick girl's fancy dictated. But as for parting with her, and suffering a separation from her, which would be only second to the bereavement she had borne, she could not hear of it. Did not Doris love her then ? Was she weary of her motherly care ? And Doris, melted by her grief and tenderness, promised to stay with her yet longer, if she would defer her return home until her health and spirits were fully recruited.

It had been a sore perplexity and disappointment to Mrs. Margraf when Paul re-

turned to Fairfield so soon after his departure from it, leaving Mrs. Aspen and Doris still alone in London. He said very little about his journey. Shutting himself up with his books, he plunged deep into some profound abyss of research, from which he emerged at rare intervals, with a grave aspect, and an extremely sparing use of his faculty of speech. Even Harriet Crofton, whose heart bounded with delight at the news of his speedy return, looked out for him in vain across the Monk's Ferry ; until, weary of her fruitless watching, she ventured to brave an encounter with Mrs. Margraf, with the hardy determination to make her way to Paul's presence, either by force or fraud. Fortune favoured her. Mrs. Margraf, having no dread of an invasion, had quitted her post to pay a diplomatic visit to Mr. Vale, whose confidential correspondence with her aunt might tend to throw some light upon the circumstances which Paul kept in such close obscurity. Harriet found the road to Paul's library undefended, and with pulses

that throbbed quickly, and limbs that trembled with strange trepidation, she lingered for a minute or two upon the threshold, before knocking a low and tremulous tap upon the door. Paul's dreamy, distant voice, as if he were far away in some remote region of thought, answered "Come in."

She turned the handle, and stood in the doorway, still hesitating, with little of the effrontery and daring of her old coquetry in her aspect. She was looking at him through the black lashes of the eyelids which half-veiled the lustrous eyes; and she paused nervously, as if needing some other invitation before venturing farther into the room. Paul had risen from his chair when he first saw her; and now with his usual quiet courtesy he advanced to meet her, to close the door behind her, and to lead her to the seat nearest to the fire; while he took his stand on the opposite side of the hearth, as if to intimate that he did not expect her visit to be a long one. She was silent for a while,

pulling off her glove, and pushing back the massive braids of hair which were falling over her face, while she stole side-long glances at Paul's gloomy features.

"You have been at home a whole week, Paul," she said, at last, "and except at church I have never seen you."

"I am not a visiting man," he answered, abruptly.

"You read too much," she said, looking at him anxiously; "but tell me how is Doris? Is she well enough for you to leave her safely? I have been dying to hear all about her, and when she will be coming home."

"Doris is recovering," he replied, biting his lips. "It was her wish, not my own, that I should leave her. I regret exceedingly that I put off going to London so long. My delay gave some colour to the rumours afloat in Thornbury."

He knew by her downward glance, and the little flutter she gave herself, though no

blush mantled her cheeks, that she was fully aware of the gossip he referred to ; but he was quite unprepared for the sight of tears, and Harriet lifted her ungloved hands to her face, as if to hide them from his scrutiny.

“I shall lose even your friendship,” she said, sobbing, “you speak harshly to me. I would never have visited the Priory if I could have foreseen this cruel gossip ; but I knew you were engaged to Miss Arnold, and I could not, could not dream of people being so busy with my name. This morning I came over most reluctantly to solicit a favour from you as Richard’s friend and mine, to lay before you the burden that is upon my mind, and to ask you to save us from positive ruin. Paul, Paul, you are completely avenged.”

She was weeping unrestrainedly now ; and Paul’s resentment and determination were ever melted by a woman’s tears. He felt exceedingly uneasy ; anxious to impart some consolation, yet quite unable to think of any

ordinary phrase of conventional sympathy. When he spoke, after an embarrassed pause, it was in the same tones of soothing kindness, that he had used to Doris, and into which his voice habitually fell when addressing any woman who appeared before him in suffering or distress.

“What is it, Harriet?” he asked. “If you are in any trouble that I can relieve, you may tell it to me freely. For the sake of old times you may speak.”

He was thinking of the old times, but it was unconsciously that he spoke of them, as he looked down upon the beautiful face raised to him again, with the tears still clinging to the eye-lashes. The colour mounted up now to Harriet's forehead, and deepened down to the tips of her delicate fingers, which were folded in a meek attitude upon her lap. She glanced up from him to the portrait of Doris, and his eyes following hers, he sighed involuntarily, and with a passing shadow of regret.

“Paul,” she said, suddenly, “we are so poor, Richard and I. He has squandered all his property, run through it madly, while I have tried, oh! you cannot believe how I have tried, to keep things together. I have often and often denied myself real necessaries in order to pay his tradespeople; and then I have heard the blame laid to me. Once, Paul, you asked me if I could endure hardships for your sake. I have had to bear them; and not, not for you! Oh! how many times I have thought of you!”

She paused to indulge in fresh tears for a minute or two, and in furtive glances at his embarrassment, but she soon spoke again with renewed energy.

“I could die sooner than tell anybody else; but you are too noble and generous to despise us, and cease to care for us, because we are poor. If you did not love Doris, I should not be sure that you have forgiven us, and could feel friendly towards us again. So, Paul, I want you, I implore of you, to talk

with Richard, and get him to lay our affairs before you plainly. Then you will see what can be done, and I shall be better satisfied. I know them all as well as he does, but you would rather discuss them with him than with me. Sometimes I am afraid of falling into the extremest poverty ; even of having to be sent, when I am an old woman and nobody cares for me, to the dreadful workhouse. Have ladies like me ever been sent there, Paul ? ”

He smiled as he looked at her white fingers laden with rings, and at the tasteful expense of her dress. Harriet caught the smile with a pretty pout, and a gleam of mischief, which sparkled effectively upon her features.

“ You are mocking me,” she said, rising and extending her hand, “ but it is true ; I am afraid of that, when I am old, and wrinkled, and withered ; for you men care for us only while we attract you. We are going headlong to ruin ; I want you to

stretch out your hand to save me if you can. You can do almost anything with Richard ; will you ? Will you come over, and get him to have a long talk with you ? Emma is going out this evening, and you will be uninterrupted ; and perhaps you will rescue me from going into the workhouse."

" I will come, Harriet," he answered. " We will see what can be done. But you must get Richard to be frank with me. In such matters your friend must know everything."

" My friend shall," she said, with a gentle emphasis upon the words. Thanking him earnestly for his kindness, and refusing his escort to the door, she descended the staircase with an air of triumph. Meeting Mrs. Margraf coming in from her visit to the Vicarage, she saluted and embraced her with the warmest demonstration of friendship.

Richard Crofton's affairs were in a state of terrible confusion ; and in some manner Harriet's elucidation of them perplexed her

husband quite as much as it did Paul. He was confounded by finding large sums set down as debts incurred by him for extravagances which had no temptations for him, for she had her own reckless expenditure to garble, so as to convince Paul of the truth of her statement that she had striven to keep things together. When the accounts grew too involved, and Paul, with his ignorance of money-matters, which he was by no means willing to own, became bewildered in their inextricable maze, a few womanish arts set all to rights with greater ease and pleasure than a more fixed investigation. She gained her end by so interesting him in them, that he thought no more of the idle gossip of the neighbourhood, but gave himself heartily to the task which she shared ; and she mingled so much subtle flattery, and delicate treatment of his masculine self-love, with his occupation, that he soon recovered from the slight shock of mortification which he had suffered from Doris.

In the meantime Emma was going through finely graduated shades of mourning for John. She passed as rapidly through her code of affliction as a Romish peasant telling his beads. At last she had arrived, with as much expedition as a due decency and the dictates of fashion would permit her, to throwing aside her widow's caps, and permitting little gleams of white to relieve the gloom of her sable robes. Her spirits had cast off the weeds long beforehand, and her heart had forgotten its widowhood. It was an extremely agreeable circumstance to find herself sole mistress of the Priory, after holding the subordinate position of a daughter-in-law during the whole term of her married life; for Mrs. Aspen had never yielded to her the dignity of being the head of the household. She enjoyed also the little stir of excitement and society which Harriet Crofton maintained about her wherever she went; and it was not the less pleasant because she was conscious that it would be altogether

opposed to the strict decorum of Mrs. Aspen's notions.

Tom Fanshawe was still lingering in Thornbury, though he had quitted the modest dwelling at Murivance for more pretentious quarters. But he was a constant guest, almost an inmate, at the Priory. The gay, handsome young man, in whose companionship there were no tedious hours, was only too gladly welcomed in the dull monotony of the country house, and he was well satisfied to bury his talents for a season in this rustic retirement. It never occurred to him, and everybody else was so well aware of the fact that it was never mentioned, that the Priory, with its rich pasture-lands, no more belonged to Emma Aspen than to Harriet Crofton. Indeed the latter, with a far-seeing motive, assured him confidentially that John had left all his possessions to his beloved wife. He found her there, the ostensible mistress, presiding absolutely over the household, with no more appearance of deferring to the dowager

PAUL'S COURTSHIP.

widow, absent in London, than if she had been really a poor pensioner upon the estate. In fact, Tom Fanshawe, having never seen Mrs. Aspen, and hearing of her only in connection with Doris Arnold, and the Monkmoor Roundelays, now circulated through Thornbury and the vicinity, was almost oblivious of her existence. Not more fervently did Mrs. Margraf covet a scheme for the possession of Monkmoor Priory than did he long for it, and confidently expect it, as the dower which the childless widow would bring to her second husband.

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY in May, Mrs. Margraf received the following letter from Doris Arnold.

“DEAR MRS. MARGRAF,—It will not surprise you to hear that I cannot any longer consent to carry on the very useless and very blamable deception of which we have been guilty. How painful it has been to me I could never tell you ; and only that I thought with you that Rufus, whom I love truly as a brother, would more quickly conquer his attachment for me, I could never have carried on the imposture so long. I have endeavoured to bring my engagement with Mrs. Aspen to a close now that my work is done, but she will not listen to any suggestion of parting with me ; and but for my false position with regard to Dr. Lockley, I should most thankfully and

gladly remain with her. Though she is longing to return to her own home, she says she is willing to stay with me at the seaside until I will accompany her. It is not right for me to keep her away from all her friends ; yet I cannot come back to Ryton until it is distinctly understood that my apparent engagement with Dr. Lockley is altogether at an end. It will be disagreeable to both of us to be made the gossip of the neighbourhood, but better that than that we should continue a deception which has involved us in continual pain and humiliation. You will be kind enough to give this letter to Dr. Lockley, and communicate to me his consent. Very few persons will be astonished at the breaking off of a betrothal which has never borne the aspect of a truth.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ DORIS ARNOLD.”

Mrs. Margraf pondered long over this letter. For some time past the affairs of

her family had seemed to escape from her management, and to pursue an erratic course, which she could only see and bemoan helplessly. Her power had slipped through her fingers ; even Rufus, though he was as gentle as ever, kept the sacred secrets of his heart shielded from her keen eye and probing touch. She remembered, with unutterable regret, the words which Doris had dropped many months since, that if Rufus pleaded long enough she might consent ; words that had shot a thrill of fear through her when she heard them, but which she now recalled with deep concern, for Paul had told her what Mrs. Aspen said to him about making Rufus her heir, if Doris would marry him. It was a sly stab of Paul's, but he did not know how keenly it avenged him. What could she do ? Could Rufus, with all his infatuation of love for Doris, ever forgive the artifice played upon him, or would Doris now, after this long interval of pain and vexation, listen to his suit ? It seemed scarcely possible. On the other hand, how

would it sound in the ears of the world that Doris Arnold had broken off her engagement to Paul Lockley, because of his too marked attentions to the object of his first love, for that would be the reason universally assigned for the disrapture. There was very much in Paul, too, that she could not understand. He spoke always of Doris in tones so tender and regretful ; he was so moody when she spoke much of her ; once since his return from London she had seen him regard her portrait with a new expression of disquietude and discontent, which had further betrayed itself by a muttered execration of his own folly. If Rufus could not marry Doris, Paul might ; and it was tolerably sure that if either of the brothers could win her, he would win with her the coveted inheritance. Mrs. Margraf was reluctant to relinquish any advantage that her side possessed, by the revokement of a contract which she now fervently wished was a real one. Doris was pledged in the estimation of the public ; if she could only be

prevailed upon to renew the pledge by coming back, and resuming her relation to Paul, she trusted to some lucky concurrence of events in the future, and her own bland management, to bring her hopes to a favourable issue. With untold difficulty she wrote a reply to Doris's letter.

“ MY DEAREST DORIS,— Show your letter to Paul! I dare not, indeed I dare not. However it would wound him; and only a sister can know how grieved he would be; he would consent to your request at once, and take all the blame to himself. I don't think my dear Doris has considered what the censure passed upon him would be. It has been whispered here—I could not repeat the scandal to you if I were not sure of your generous nature—that Paul's apparent neglect of you during your dangerous illness is owing to Harriet Crofton's influence. If you could have seen him as I saw him; anxious, uncertain, longing to fly to take care of you, but

restrained by the most delicate consideration for your feelings ; wavering from hour to hour as to what he ought to do ; lamenting the unfortunate falseness of the relationship between you which deterred him from proving the reality and strength of his profound regard and affection for you ; envying the unembarrassed attendance of Rufus ; if you could have seen all this, you would have learned something of Paul's feelings towards you. That our dear Rufus loves you so deeply and vainly would be enough to claim for you his sympathy ; but your own merits, merits peculiarly adapted to please a man like Paul, have fixed you firmly in his esteem. It was for your sake alone that he submitted to remain at home, while his feelings prompted him to hasten to London. This unfortunate delicacy of his has brought upon him a thousand scandals ; and I ask my dear Doris to consider what a grave affirmative she will give to all the rumours and the censures floating about his fair fame, and mine, and

Harriet's, if she insists upon the public renunciation of her engagement to him. But for this betrothal Mrs. Aspen would never have consented to the return of the Croftons to the Priory. Oh, Doris! reflect, consider, and be charitable towards Paul. I could urge many things for the sake of my poor boy; but I will only plead for Paul, and the estimation in which he stands with his neighbours. All I ask of you is to shield him from dishonour. Return to us, and be seen with him now and then as before; let the world take notice that you do not cast him off, because of a little foolish gossip. The Croftons must be leaving the Priory soon. My aunt already hints that she will be willing to resume her old place there before long. As soon as they are gone you shall act as you like, and put an end to this deception as you call it, which has brought you into very close and dear connection with me; for it has long since assumed the aspect of a reality to my mind, and I have grown accustomed to think of Doris Arnold

as a sister. Neither Paul nor Rufus could ever have a wife, who would be dearer to the heart of

“Your truly attached and loving friend,
“SOPHIA MARGRAF.”

Doris smiled shrewdly and bitterly over Mrs. Margraf's affectionate epistle ; though an expression of pain settled upon her face, and continued there while she thought over its contents. She longed eagerly to be freed from the meshes in which she found herself entangled, but the moment of release was not yet come. From the first humiliation that had befallen her in carrying on the scheme of fraud and conspiracy against Rufus, she had looked forward to the publication of Mrs. Aspen's poems as the period of release. But the aged lady was so closely bound to her, and clung to her with so tenacious an affection, that she felt it would be both cruel and ungrateful to insist upon a separation. She had herself no home, and but few intimate friends ; and it

seemed hard that her almost involuntary fault should banish her from a friend, who regarded her as a most beloved daughter. But behind all the miserable discomfort of her thoughts, there lurked the reflection that she would compromise Paul, by persisting in leaving Mrs. Aspen, or refusing to return to Ryton without the fulfilment of the condition she had mentioned to Mrs. Margraf. She saw clearly that her protracted absence was deepening the cloud of censure resting upon him, which would break into a storm if her return had to be preceded by a formal announcement that their engagement was at an end. Look whatever way she might she could perceive nothing but confusion, and vexation, and chagrin. But for some reason, not quite owned to herself, she decided to bear for a little while longer the burden that weighed more heavily upon her than upon any one else.

“Shall we go home soon?” she said to Mrs. Aspen, whose eyes beamed with delight

and surprise at the unexpected question, though she looked anxiously into Doris's grave face, as if to discover if it were really her wish to go back to Ryton.]

“I have been longing to go home ever since we came here, my love,” she answered; “but are you sure you are quite ready? Does Paul want you back again? Your letter is from Fairfield, I saw. My dear, do try to attract Paul more. Harriet Crofton is all attraction, like a magnet; and is as hard and cold. But you, Doris; you will not condescend to use any little arts. I assure you I had to make it evident to Mr. Aspen that I preferred him, or he would never have remained constant to me. It will not do for any man, to assume an indifference to him, even for Paul. You must try to lure him. If any man is worth it, Paul is.”

“He did not come to London until the fever was over,” said Doris.

“Does he confess that to you?” asked Mrs. Aspen, with a slight blush. “Forgive

me, Doris, but I could not bear to undecieve you when I saw that you thought he had been with us all the time. You punished him enough by dismissing him so quickly, and you must not cherish any more anger against him. Rufus was there from the first."

"Poor Rufus!" sighed Doris, thoughtful for some minutes, but waking from her reverie with a sudden question. "Mrs. Aspen, are Mr. and Mrs. Crofton likely to stay long at the Priory?"

"They shall not," she replied, decisively. "It is only for poor Emma's sake that they have stayed there so long; and it is difficult to get rid of your visitors. My dear, we must not forget that she is a widow and very lonely; John's widow. We will not grudge her the comfort of choosing her own friends."

"No, no," said Doris, fondling Mrs. Aspen's hand; "never mind, we will go home in spite of them."

"Jealous!" thought Mrs. Aspen, looking keenly at her face, when the brows were

slightly knitted, and the lips set with some rigidity ; but she did not put her thought into words.

“ Will Paul come to fetch us ? ” she inquired.

“ Oh, dear, no ! ” cried Doris, “ we can do very well without him, or anybody else. There is no need for us to make any fuss about going home. You know Mr. Vale sends us word that ever since we left the Vicarage our rooms have been kept ready for our return, as if we were expected every day.”

Mrs. Aspen bridled a little, and dropped her eyelids with a conscious glance. Doris laughed a ringing, merry laugh, that sounded pleasantly in Mrs. Aspen's ears, for she laughed but seldom, and only of late had there been a slight return of merriment to her spirits.

“ You are really getting better, my love,” she said, “ when you can laugh at an old woman like me. Well then, we will test the truth of Mr. Vale's profession, and not send

them word at all. We shall take them quite by surprise; and Paul too, eh! Doris?"

They were not long in acting upon their decision, for Mrs. Aspen had been home-sick for some time, and longed to wear her laurels in the sight of those who knew her. "The Monk-moor Roundelays," an elegantly illustrated edition, had sold very well at Thornbury, where she and the Priory possessed a local reputation; and it was with some natural and legitimate pride that she looked forward to being seen again by those who would regard her with the admiration and reverence due to a poetess of her years, whose verses had found honourable mention in the *Athenæum*. At the Thornbury Station, where several hats were raised in salutation to her, and where the officials, with obsequious attention long unknown in the levelling tumult of London, flew to attend to her wants, Mrs. Aspen felt that she was restored once again, and for ever, to her native sphere. Nothing

should induce her to leave her own place and her own people again.

The drive along the river-side, with the perfumed freshness of the country air, and the prospect far and wide of green pastures belted with the snow-white hawthorn blossoms of the hedge-rows, filled her heart with rapture. Her emotion grew almost too great for her self-control ; and Doris, perceiving it, reproached herself for keeping her so long away from the old paternal fields, and the church-bells of her home. She too, threw off her gravity and languor, and drank in the exhilarating pleasure of returning to a familiar abode. She resolved within herself to take things as they came, and not to fret vainly against the chain that fettered her. Why should it mar the peace and comfort she might find in Mrs. Aspen's mother-like love ? Why should she chafe herself for the sake of Paul Lockley, or his brother ? She would be at rest, and let outer circumstances run on as they listed.

Ryton was reached, and the house at Fairfield, which was on the way to the Vicarage. There was a group assembled upon the terrace, in full view of the road along which there came the rare appearance of a carriage, the destination of which must be either Fairfield or the Vicarage. Mrs. Aspen's maid upon the box beside the driver was detected instantly, and the united exclamations of several voices made a shout of welcome loud enough to arrest their further progress. The carriage was surrounded in a moment. Paul lifted Doris out in a bewildered surprise, and forgot that Mrs. Aspen was left behind ; an act of oblivion which she forgave on the spot. Mrs. Margraf received her dear aunt with almost tearful rapture. Richard and Harriet Crofton stood by with smiles of greeting; and Emma, in her modulated mourning, with handsome Tom Fanshawe at her side. It was very much such a scene as Mrs. Aspen's fancy had painted.

Doris was listening to Paul's earnest congratulations and inquiries with downcast eyes ; but she looked round at last ; turned pale, so pale that Paul uttered an exclamation of surprise, and stretched out his arms in time to prevent her falling to the ground. From some cause or other ; from fatigue, or undue excitement or a lingering debility, Doris Arnold had fainted ; and Paul carried her into the house followed by the whole train, giving expression to various conjectures and lamentations.

Her senses returned before long, but Paul insisted upon her being kept quiet, and forbade any one, except Mrs. Aspen and himself, to stay with her. There had been a scene upon which Mrs. Aspen had not calculated, and which she could not understand, unless Doris was suddenly overcome by the sight of Paul and Harriet Crofton in such evidently familiar companionship. However, as she watched beside Doris, who lay motionless and speechless upon the sofa, taking little

heed of Paul's attendance, she determined within herself that the Priory should soon be freed from the presence of its dangerous guests.

CHAPTER XII.



BESIDES Paul and Mrs. Aspen there had been a third person, who exhibited considerable agitation at the sudden faintness of Doris. Tom Fanshawe had uttered a sharp, short exclamation of "Doris!" when she staggered forward with her white face, and glazing eyes, and if Paul had not been nearer her, his extended arms would have caught her before she fell. In the general confusion he imagined that his conduct had escaped observation, but Emma's eyes were upon him. Though she said nothing until Paul closed the door upon every one except himself and Mrs. Aspen, she came jealously to the charge, as soon as they found themselves alone again upon the sunny terrace.

"Tom!" she said, for they had arrived at

the familiarity of addressing each other by their Christian names ; “Tom, you know Doris Arnold ? ”

“Well, yes,” he replied, hesitatingly, “I know her a little ; but I know her brother better. A terrible scamp, my dear Emma—pardon me, a slip of the tongue—but, as always in my many thoughts of you, I speak to you as my dear Emma, the words rise too readily to my lips.”

Emma glanced away with a gentle, forgiving sigh, and folded her dimpled hands over one another meekly, while she breathed in a low tone, “Poor John ! ”

“Yet he could say what he pleased,” continued Tom ; “he was not compelled to put a constant constraint upon his feelings. So you believe that no other man can cherish the same affection for you. If I had a liberty of speech like his ! ”

He looked unutterable things into her shallow blue eyes. Emma sighed once more, and glanced away, and back again at his

handsome face, with one of Harriet's sidelong ogles; and he pursued the conversation with an air of greater confidence.

"George Arnold was an old schoolfellow and friend of mine," he said, but his conduct grew too bad for even his dearest friends to countenance him. I believe he is somewhere on the continent, living under an assumed name. Well, I fear poor little Doris was agitated at seeing me here so unexpectedly; and I think the wisest and kindest course will be for me to keep out of her way as much as possible. George, you understand, was guilty of forgery, upon his own father, who of course could not prosecute him. Little Doris has never mentioned her brother?"

"Never," replied Emma. "She has always represented herself as having neither home nor friends."

"She has neither," said Tom, with a mournful sympathy that sat well upon him, and he pressed Emma's arm to his side. "A scapegrace brother is no friend. But you must

say nothing of all this, dear Emma. I would not for worlds do the girl any harm, especially with Dr. Lockley. I should not wonder if little Doris tries to see me alone ; but I could not endure you to misunderstand it, and I shall avoid having any private interview with her. She will wish me to promise not to mention George among you ; so if you should hear by any chance of her seeking me out, even in Thornbury, you will not be—what shall I call it ?”

“ I shall not be jealous,” whispered Emma, with another side-long glance.

An answering look of rapture dawned upon Tom's countenance.

“ I shall keep out of her way as much as possible,” he continued, “ but I've scarcely a doubt she will try her best to see me alone. Do you suppose she has told Lockley about George ?”

“ Not a word !” replied Emma, with virtuous indignation. “ It was only the other day he was telling Harriet that she had no

near relatives. It is very deceitful of her!"

"Well, well, we conceal our dishonour," said Tom, "especially from those we love most. If any family disgrace attached to me, do you think I could tell you? The gods forbid!"

"You might!" she answered, in a tone that at once repudiated the idea that any dishonour could attach to him, and at the same time insinuated the lenient indulgence with which she would regard it.

"Angel!" murmured Tom, bending as devoutly over her hand, as he dared to do, with Mrs. Margraf's keen eyes upon them from her seat at the other end of the terrace. Mrs. Margraf looked favourably upon Tom Fanshawe's intimacy with John Aspen's widow, as being likely to remove one of the encumbrances upon the Monkmoor estate. So she smiled as she watched their close conversation apart, and when Harriet was about to interrupt it, gave her a gracious invitation to take

a seat at her side ; so rare a courtesy that Harriet accepted it with some mental speculation as to the cause.

Events proved Tom Fanshawe's surmise respecting Doris Arnold to be correct. The very first morning after their re-establishment at the Vicarage ; where Mrs. Aspen found the apartments she had honoured by occupying them kept in perfect readiness for her return ; Doris, still feeble from the fatigue and agitation of the previous evening, expressed her intention of visiting the Priory some time during the day. She continued firm to her purpose, like an obstinate child, though Mrs. Aspen reasoned and pleaded with her to take more rest before making new exertions. Even Paul, who went over to the Vicarage at an early hour, and felt her pulse with a grave and professional air that could have had nothing to do with its rapid and irregular throbbing, failed in persuading her to postpone her visit ; an intention so strange that he watched her anxious and changeful expression,

with great perplexity, and wondered whether she could have heard of the unpleasant rumours freely circulating in the neighbourhood concerning Harriet Crofton and himself. In spite of these, and his nervous shrinking from having his name bandied about as a butt to gossip and scandal, he had found himself, since his journey to London, involved in a more intimate and intricate mesh of associations with the Croftons, which he could not break through at his pleasure; and the return of Doris brought with it a sense of relief, as if the still acknowledged engagement between them would raise a shield against the thickly gathering darts of calumny and censure. So when Doris, trembling and feverish, with unsteady eyes and flushing cheeks, persisted that she must and would go over to the Priory that very day Paul said gravely, that as he had some business with Richard Crofton he would gladly escort her thither. Upon which Mrs. Aspen at once withdrew her opposition.

Paul had begun to feel a protection in Doris's presence ; in the light touch of her hand upon his arm, and the pure, delicate aspect of her face at his side. Following her with his eyes, or sitting tranquilly beside her, the disquieting image of Harriet Crofton, which haunted him with a constant and tyrannical fascination, faded away and left him at peace. This old love of his, whom he loved no longer, had succeeded in gaining a painful hold upon his sympathy and memory ; so that, do what he would, he seemed unable to shake off the unwelcome thoughts, which clung to his imagination even in the once sacred seclusion of his study. For some time past, he had been saying to himself that a real betrothal, a true, veritable pledging of his love, which survived all the dreary sepulture of three long years, would have the power of delivering him from the subtle and scarcely confessed torment ; even the mere phantom of such a contract possessed a sweetness and strength to which he gratefully fled

for refuge, He had an instinctive feeling that with Doris at his side, Harriet's tones and glances would fall harmlessly upon him, and would find no lurking place in the recesses of his treacherous imagination. Wherever he and Doris appeared together, he would have a right to devote the greater part of his attention to her; Harriet herself could find no fault, if, now that she had returned, he paid to her the undivided regard which their position to each other warranted.

They entered the Priory together; and Harriet's veins tingled with a sharp thrill of jealousy, as she felt, with a swift intuition, that her arts were shorn of half their power. Paul looked handsome and self-possessed, and Doris lovely, with her still delicate and spiritual face bearing the faint traces of her recent illness, which formed a ground of excuse for the marked care of Paul. There was sufficient ardour in his manner to probe the deepest source of venom in Harriet's nature. Until now she had despised this Doris, weak,

cold, and unattractive as she seemed to her ; but when Paul looked upon her with solicitude ; sat beside her with a new air of satisfaction and tranquillity upon his features ; and listened with marked interest to every word she spoke, in her low, almost timid voice, the old love felt that she could never think of the new one without an intense hatred.

Doris lingered at the Priory, and accepted the invitation to lunch there without a moment's hesitation. But Tom Fanshawe did not make his appearance, nor was his name mentioned, for Harriet was almost oblivious of his existence except at the card-table ; and Emma held such a clue to the cause of Doris's prolonged visit as kept her silent about him, if it were for the mere pleasure of tantalising her. Doris grew restless and expectant ; but at last the time arrived when she could no longer defer her departure, and she took her leave when Paul, who had been deep in business with Richard Crofton, announced that he was waiting to accompany her. But

before quitting the Priory she told Emma, who smiled at the transparent deception, that she wished to take some views of the ruins, and she should probably cross over the river every fine morning to pursue her design, while the days were yet cool and pleasant in the early summer.

CHAPTER XIII.



MRS. ASPEN'S purpose of again banishing the Croftons from Monkmoor Priory did not seem likely to succeed. Far away, and heartsick for familiar scenes and faces, she imagined herself strong enough to return to her own house, and to occupy the place made sacred and solemn by the memory of her only son. But when she came back to Ryton, and saw the fatal ruins with its blood-stained turret lying under her eyes upon the opposite bank of the river, she recoiled from setting her foot upon the death-shadowed threshold. There was a sharp conflict of ancient, domestic love, and of new aversion in her heart. It was still so short a time since John's death, she said to Doris, and the very tone of his voice seemed to echo in her ears ; if she

went to dwell in the old habitation, she should be listening for his footstep, and for his hearty greeting. It had been her intention^a to resume her residence there, and thus delicately to intimate that Emma was no longer the hostess, upon whom the continued sojourn of the guests depended; but from day to day she postponed the dreaded effort; and Mr. Vale's vehement and pathetic refusal to hear any hint of their departure put an end altogether to her scruples of making the Vicarage her home, until Doris should be married from it.

As for Emma, the faintest allusion to the ejection of the Croftons convulsed her with hysterical weeping. John had appointed Richard Crofton to be her guardian, and any slight shown to him would be a disrespect to his memory which she could not bear to think of. She employed all the power she possessed over her indulgent mother-in-law to retain her chosen friends in their very eligible quarters; and Mrs. Aspen could not resist

her persevering entreaties. Emma had no desire whatever for her poor John's mother to resume her former sway over the Priory ; and she had a shrewd suspicion that the continued presence of Harriet Crofton would tend to prevent her from paying even a temporary visit to it, which, by breaking through the romantic aversion she had conceived to it, might lead to her permanent return. Emma was more than willing to be considered Mrs. Aspen of Monkmoor Priory ; so cunning a web of oblivion had been woven about the dowager lady, that her right of proprietorship was fading from the recognition even of those who knew well that the Priory was hers. It appeared the most natural and considerate course in the world for her to withdraw into obscurity. Emma, vaunting through the wainscoted rooms of the Priory, and parading the ruins where her husband had been killed, strove hard to forget that she was not the absolute owner and mistress she appeared to be.

One circumstance annoyed Emma greatly. Tom Fanshawe's prolonged morning visits had ceased altogether since she told him, as a proof of her discernment, that Doris Arnold was lying in wait for him under the pretext of taking views of the ruins. She always met him accidentally whenever she went to Thornbury, which soon became a daily custom ; but he avoided the Priory, except during the late evening parties, which were kept up stealthily in spite of Mrs. Aspen's near vicinity. Punctually every day Doris crossed the river, accompanied by Paul, whose business intricacies with the Croftons were not yet unravelled, and posting herself in a commanding niche of the broken walls, where the road and the river were alike under her ken, she maintained a sentinel watch over the approaches to the Priory. Mrs. Aspen was at no loss in assigning a motive for these daily excursions ; and Mrs. Margraf rejoiced in the fine dust they cast into the evil eyes of the spectators who were keenly scanning

her domestic drama. But she felt puzzled at this most unexpected and unexampled co-operation of Doris. She was delighted that she permitted Paul to row her across the river to and fro, and to attend upon her with the assiduity of a lover; but she was perplexed by the change in Doris, and she always liked to see what clue was being unwound. There was a happy lull in the gossip; for who could censure Paul's frequent visits to the Priory, when Doris invariably accompanied him? yet Mrs. Margraf could not be quite at ease, until she could fathom the concealed motive which actuated her conduct.

Paul himself felt that, however appearances might seem otherwise, he made no progress in Doris's regard. She was more silent and abstracted than ever when she was beside him, though he began to bend his attention towards subjects which would secure her interest, and draw out the stores of her well-cultivated mind. He scouted the idea of

reciting Greek verse to her, and longed to hear her converse in intelligent and familiar English. When she spoke, he heard the ring of true gold in her opinions, but it was seldom he could get her to utter them. If he chose to remain near to her while she made her sketches ; lying on the turf at her feet while Harriet wandered about like an unquiet spirit, eating her own heart in fruitless rage ; Doris made no objection, but she gave him neither word nor look of encouragement. If he left her, and delayed till the last moment she had fixed for her return, only springing into the ferry-boat as it pushed off from the steps, she manifested no symptom of displeasure. Paul was no longer indifferent. Harriet's troubling touch had swept away all the calm, icy barriers he had reared between himself, and the old longings, which had once broken in upon his heart, and left it desolate. He wished to love, and to be loved. But Doris only turned upon him cold and steadfast eyes, whose rays had as little

warmth in them as the beams of a wintry sun.

Paul entered the sitting-room at the Vicarage, one morning, a moment or two after Dcris had left it ; while it retained an undefined sense of occupancy about it, as of a lingering presence. There was the chair which she had just pushed back from the table ; the ink not yet dry in her pen ; and a book lying upon her desk closed, but with the leaves still lying loosely upon each other, and not yet pressed together by their own weight. The song of the lark which thrilled through the open window rang joyously into her ears before she withdrew from the place where he was seeking her, and the upward circles of the bird's flight were not yet finished. Paul sighed unconsciously. There was a more tender and pensive sentiment in the diffused warmth of her recent presence, than in the constraint and coldness with which she would have received him. He seated himself in the chair she had just left, and drew towards him

the book still elastic with the touch of her fingers. It opened readily at the place where she had been reading, for there was a marker in it ; a little, delicate envelope, addressed in her own handwriting to Tom Fanshawe.

Paul started as if he had been stung, and closing the volume sharply, strode away to the open window. There stood Doris in the enclosed lawn among the roses, with the old Vicar pointing out to her the finest specimens of his cherished flowers. She looked very fair, and placid, and innocent, in her pale-coloured morning-dress, with the flickering of the sunbeams playing about her golden hair, through the branches of the clustering trees. Her face seemed to have absorbed some of the sunny light of the morning, and transmuted it into the quiet smiles, with which she was listening to Mr. Vale's eulogiums. Paul gazed upon her with a jealous stirring at his heart. What could Doris have to do with Tom Fanshawe, yonder gay, handsome fop, whom he despised heartily, and who

spent his life in dancing attendance upon such women as Harriet Crofton and Emma Aspen ? He would have rejoiced in the right of calling her away from her admiration of the roses to render him an account of her correspondence. To quarrel with Doris ; to oppress her with jealous accusations ; to torture himself and her with a feigned indifference ; and to return to her for pardon, or to see her seeking a reconciliation. Paul felt how delicious in its pain and agitation such a quarrel might be ; but he could do nothing but look at her from a distance, and wonder with a strange disquietude whatever she could have to say to Tom Fanshawe.

His question met with a partial answer an evening or two afterwards. Doris expressed a new whim to visit the Priory by moonlight, and see the effect of the silvery tints upon its grey and ivy-clad walls. Paul and Mrs. Margraf were already gone over to one of the evening entertainments which were not concealed from Mrs. Aspen ; and the

latter was at no loss for the cause of Doris's fresh caprice. She wished to see Paul, herself unseen, in the society of Harriet Crofton ; and she entered heartily into the execution of the design. Doris was rowed across the ferry, and landed under the arches of the ruins into whose moonlit recesses she stole noiselessly away, with the familiar tread of one who knew every footstep of the deserted place.

Deserted and desolate enough ; for after nightfall no one of the Priory household would have ventured within the blood-stained precincts. Emma would have fainted with widowed sensibility at the bare mention of treading the turf, where John's death-stricken frame had lain in anguish ; that is after the sun was gone down, and the night-shadows had thrown a ghostly and haunted aspect over the grim old walls. Harriet Crofton herself, who believed neither in angels nor spirits, did not care to trespass in the dark upon the spectre-peopled ground. Doris

found herself alone, amid the delicate penciling of the shadows upon the sward, and the deceptive, silvery gleams of the moonlight tossed hither and thither by the waving of the branches ; while all around her lurked the massive blackness of the deep recesses and empty niches ; the tremulous rustling, and half-audible footsteps, which echo in every solitude, where there are boughs to sigh in the wind, and leaves to patter together like fairy cymbals, and the feet of wild and timid creatures to scamper through the crackling grass. She lingered here and there listening eagerly, with her hand pressed against her beating heart ; but she pursued her way to a solitary corner of the cloisters, where a faint hum of the music within the house blended with the stillness of the night.

It was not unnatural that after seeing a note addressed to Tom Fanshawe in Doris's writing, Paul should bestow a little close observation upon the handsome fop. Nor

that, being of an unsuspecting nature, he should make so many inquiries concerning him from Harriet Crofton, who had introduced him to their select circle, as to give her some perception of his incipient jealousy. She kept a searching watch upon Tom Fanshawe's movements; and it was with a sensation of triumph that she summoned Paul from the drawing-room on the night of Doris's moonlight expedition, and led him into the ruins.

"You must come, Paul," she said vehemently, as he hesitated, and her dark eyes glittered with satisfaction. "This has a great deal to do with you. Tom Fanshawe stole out of the room just now, and we must follow him unseen. Hush! tread quietly."

They trode carefully through the deep gloom of the outer walls, where the thick, dank grass spread a soundless carpet for their feet, until they reached an open crevice, through which the interior could be seen. Harriet Crofton glanced through, and then

reluctantly made way for Paul. Only one could look at a time, and it was essential that he should see and hear what was passing within. There, in the soft, dim light stood Doris, with her hand resting caressingly upon the shoulder of Tom Fanshawe, who was lounging in a careless attitude against a pillar.

“I was so ill,” she was saying in a tender tone. “I thought I was dying, and I longed to see you so much ; but I never knew where you were. You must have known all the time how ill I was, yet you never came to me. My dear, I forgave you all. Ever since, I have been wondering how I could win you back to loving me a little. I am very lonely without you, very, very lonely. Only tell me that I have not lost all your love.”

“Oh, I am very fond of you,” replied Tom, carelessly.

“If the old times would only come back !” said Doris, weeping. “But you ought not

to have followed me down here. You must go away at once. At once, or I will tell Mrs. Aspen everything, It is breaking my heart to deceive her on every hand ; I cannot, cannot bear it. I have money, the money I received for my father's book, and I will give it up to you if you will only promise to go before we are found out."

" Found out," growled Tom, " before you tell, you mean."

" Yes, I will tell," she answered, resolutely. " I must tell all ; I will deceive her no longer. Why could you not leave me here in peace ? But go ; take the money, and leave this place. Promise me ; you shall not go until you give me a sure promise. It has been too hard to get this opportunity of speaking to you."

" Well, well, I promise upon my honour, Doris," said Tom, disengaging himself from her clinging hands, which were clasped round his arm. " There now, let me go, or somebody will be after us."

"Were you sorry I was so ill?" asked Doris, faintly.

"By Jove! I should think I was," he replied, with some energy, and bending down to kiss her. "Why, Dorry, it was all I could do to keep your secret, and not show myself in London, to the consternation of your old lady. I was on the point of coming up with that slow and solemn doctor of yours; as it was I opened his eyes for him. By George! you never saw the poor fellow look so wide awake,"—and Tom Fanshawe laughed a low chuckling laugh that made Paul's ears tingle.

"Now, good-bye, Doris," he resumed. "But, by-the-by, you must give me a week's grace. I really cannot get away under a week; and then I'll be off. It's a slow place. There, good-bye."

He kissed Doris again, and a few, light strides carried him out of Paul's sight, while Doris stood motionless with her face covered with her hands. The brief conversation had

so absorbed him, that it appeared like a dream. The thought had not yet occurred to him that the position in which he was placed was dishonouring to himself. Even now the keen regret of finding Doris fallen, "fallen from her high estate ;" making clandestine appointments, and meeting a former lover in the secure solitude of the ruins, so occupied his mind, that but for Harriet Crofton; who stood impatiently behind him, consumed with curiosity, while he gazed spell-bound through the niche; he would have continued absently watching the weeping girl within, or have hastened round to her side, to pour out eager words of reproach, advice, and consolation.

"Come away," whispered Harriet. "You can tell me everything when we are safe. I saw Tom return to the house a minute ago. Come, Paul."

He resigned himself again to the imperious guidance of her will, and trod softly with her along the soundless turf. At the entrance of

the cloisters, as they emerged into the light, they found themselves face to face with Doris, whose swifter steps had brought her to the same point. Her face looked pallid in the wan light, and she clasped her hands with a glance of affright at their sudden appearance. Without a word, she glided past them rapidly, and while Harriet held his arm with a strength from which he could not shake himself free, she was almost out of Paul's sight.

“Doris !” he cried ; but she neither turned nor slackened her speedy footstep. The call only assured her that he recognised her. Paul felt himself a miserable man. Doris, whom of late he had been contrasting with the coquettish worldliness of Harriet on the one hand, and with the inane silliness of Emma on the other ; Doris, whom Rufus enshrined in his heart of hearts as the type of all pure and womanly perfection ; Doris, in whom the stately and scrupulous Mrs. Aspen reposed a confidence which singled her out as exempt from all ordinary foibles and frailties ;

this Doris, whom he was beginning to care so much about, he had seen clinging to the handsome fop—he could call him by no other title—who received her caresses and tender words with such insolent indifference, that his hands had twitched with an impatient desire to seize him by the collar, and give him the shaking and horse-whipping, which, in his new-born jealousy, he felt was the only treatment Tom Fanshawe deserved. He bade Harriet farewell at the Priory door, resisting her entreaties to enter, and resume the social pleasures of the evening. As soon as he found himself at liberty, he hastened with his utmost speed to the ferry, which Doris must cross.

He was too late ; only hearing the last splash of the ferryman's oars, and the clank of the boat against the steps on the other side of the river ; and catching a momentary glimpse of the light figure of Doris running swiftly up the bowery lane which led to the Vicarage. The ferryman told him, with a

sympathetic meaning in his rough voice, and the furtive smile upon his weather-beaten face, that the young lady was only three minutes before him ; but Paul made no effort to catch up the lost time. The Vicarage gate was swinging upon its hinges, but he passed by slowly and sadly. With a sigh as profound as any which Rufus had ever given to the object of his passionate and hopeless love, he pursued his way homewards, with a mental vow to forget every woman in the world, and to resume finally the placid and congenial studies, which had for so many years borne his life along in an undisturbed current.

CHAPTER XIV.



TRUE to his resolution Paul retreated to his library the next morning, as to a fastness from whence he could successfully defend himself from every intrusive and frivolous thought, such as those which had disturbed the even tenor of his intellectual pursuits during the last few months. To secure his refuge from any unseasonable interruption, he took the precaution of fastening the bolt of the door, colouring as he did so with a sense of shame and weakness that thus only could he shield himself from influences, before which he felt feeble and unprotected. But he did not succeed in bolting out the vexatious and hindering thoughts that flitted through his brain. The old, fragmentary tragedy, which he had subjected to a score of translations, every one

doubtful and unsatisfactory, was more than ever crabbed and ambiguous ; with such crooked involutions and vague obscurities, that Paul, who had divorced himself from his habits of profound and patient investigation, found thoughts of Doris and Harriet Crofton twining with serpent-like cunning into his apparently diligent researches after possible roots. A moment of weakness came. He told himself that he was a fool, and a man of middle age, but it was in vain. After a brief and ignominious conflict, as if impelled by some possessing imp, he carried his ladder to a corner of his bookshelves ; reaching down a long unlocked desk, he drew out of its recesses a bundle of time-stained letters in Harriet's handwriting ; scattering them above and among his sacred classic volumes, he threw himself back into the far distant, forgotten, passionate past, as he read the lines which were once the most precious and most truthful in the world to him.

So engrossed was Paul in this tabooed in-

dulgence, that he did not hear a low, quiet rap at his door, until it had been repeated two or three times ; then with a gesture of impatience he crossed the room to open it no farther than to give him a survey of the invader. He had vowed hastily that neither Harriet nor Sophia should cross his threshold ; but to his utter amazement it was Doris who stood before him, grave and pale, and meeting his astonished gaze, with a meek aspect of anxiety in her uplifted eyes. He flung the door wide open, with an invitation to enter, which she did frankly and unhesitatingly. Paul closed the door in bewilderment, and followed her to the window, whither she had made her way.

“ May I speak to you, Dr. Lockley ? ” she said, with a downcast face, and hands which trembled visibly, in spite of the calm tranquillity of her voice and manner.

He came to the instant and irresistible conclusion that she was about to give some explanation of the mysterious interview with

Tom Fanshawe on the previous evening, and a pleasurable emotion thrilled through him. But such a confession must be painful to her, and bringing her a chair, he took up a station a little behind her, where she had no need to see his face.

“Doris,” he said, “you may be as frank with me as a brother. I wished to speak to you last night, and I followed you so closely that the boat was only just landing you on this side, when I reached the opposite bank. I was anxious to have some explanation with you, but I should not have ventured to ask for one, after the first impulse to seek it had passed away. Do not hesitate to speak freely to me. You have never yet made any claim upon my friendship.”

Doris turned her head a little and looked into his face with an expression of pain and concern. His eye followed hers as it rested for an instant upon the centre table, with the scattered letters lying upon it in all directions, their yellow pages plainly indicating that they

were some treasured memorials of the past. Paul felt his face burn under the momentary glance with which her survey ended, and he waited nervously for her next utterance.

“Dr. Lockley,” she said, in a voice that had grown tremulous, “we were entrapped into one foolish and worse than useless deception. It has been as great a pain to me as to yourself. Yet because it has thrown us more together than we could otherwise have been, it has made me know you so well that I wish for your esteem and friendship.”

“You have both,” he said, with some difficulty restraining himself from taking her trembling hands in his grasp.

“I think I have,” she continued, softly, “or I should be afraid of speaking to you as I am going to do. I believe you to be a good man, Dr. Lockley ; true and noble-hearted, in spite of this paltry falsehood of ours. But you are not leading an ordinary life ; you shut yourself up here, and scarcely see what people are doing, or hear what they are say-

ing around you. When you come among us you are like a man who is in some dream or reverie of his own. You have no especial friend. There is nobody who will dare to come boldly, and speak the simple truth to you. All of us see you drifting on and on into a great evil, and we have not the courage to raise our voices loud enough to warn you."

"Doris!" exclaimed Paul, in a tone of amazement.

"Dr. Lockley," she said, lifting her hand to her burning cheeks, "I am going to take some advantage of the false relation in which we have placed ourselves. I will speak to you as if you had once been to me what the world thinks you are. I have seen too many men make shipwreck of their lives not to care for your welfare. It is chiefly our falsehood that has brought you and her into these circumstances of temptation. Mrs. Aspen tells me often that but for our supposed engagement; your supposed attachment to me; she would

never have consented to Mrs. Crofton's return to the Priory."

"Doris," answered Paul, in an accent unmistakeably angry and bitter, "I did not imagine that you and Mrs. Aspen could condescend to the foolish gossip of tattlers."

He walked wrathfully away, and threw himself into his chair before the littered table, across which his eyes met her reproachful gaze, as she stood up, and faced him with a frank air of friendly concern.

"I must go on now," she said. "If I stop here, I shall lose your friendship, and do you no good. You say it is gossip; but it is not gossip alone, though that is bad enough. They tell me that all Thornbury rings with scandals; false and wicked calumnies I know them to be; concerning both of you. I do not listen to them; but since I came home I have been judging for myself; and even I, who trust in you, and believe you to be through it all a good and true and noble man, even I am alarmed for you. It is the old

love, the first and only one. I know how your life has been sacrificed to it, Dr. Lockley. She is so lovely and fascinating—even to me—and you are so free from all suspicion either of yourself or her, that you are drifting on insensibly towards a horrible calamity.”

“It is only gossip, Doris,” repeated Paul, looking into her eager and pleading face.

“No,” she answered, sorrowfully, “I have been taking careful heed for myself. I thought that it was her influence which kept you away from London, when you knew Mrs. Aspen was alone and friendless. I consented to return here as still betrothed to you solely to shield you from the greater scandal that would arise. Since we came home I have seen you together. Is it mere gossip that you were wandering with her about the ruins last night, where nobody but yourselves would venture after dusk? Is it gossip that her letters lie there—I know they are her old letters—and that you are reading them alone,

with your door bolted, lest any one should steal in upon you unperceived ?”

She spoke rapidly, but with low and sad intonations of her voice which fell upon his ear like some melancholy strain of music ; her sorrowful gaze fastened upon him seemed to give the keen edge of truth to her regretful accusations. Paul covered his face, as if in some dream of a condemning angel passing sentence upon his life ; and Doris stepped silently across the floor, and knelt beside him.

“ Paul,” she said, and the whisper close to his ear thrilled through him, “ let me speak to you as your sister and friend. Let me speak to you as I would have done if I had been what they think I am. I do not blame you yet. Until last night there was nothing that grieved or alarmed me greatly. We are all wandering in a maze of fraud and imposture, and it is not I who can blame you. The old love was there smouldering unsuspectedly, and there was no new love to extinguish it. You did not know how it was being fanned

into a flame ; it was done so skilfully and treacherously. But look on to the end, Paul. How can it end ? What is there for you of either hope or joy, while you continue true to your honourable nature ?”

Paul lifted up his head, and leaned back in his chair, where he could look into the earnest, flushing face of Doris, whose eyes were bright with tears, whose lips were trembling with emotion. He touched tenderly the clasped hands which rested upon the arm of the chair, with the wish ready to frame itself into words that the fraud could be ended, yet their relationship as betrothed man and wife still subsist ; but the recollection of her stolen interview with Tom Fanshawe crossed his mind, and effectually checked the utterance of the strong desire.

“Doris,” he answered, almost as sadly and reproachfully as she had spoken, “you feel kindly towards me, and I thank you for it. Of course there cannot be even the freedom and confidence of friendship between us, be-

cause of this accursed folly, or there are some questions I should like to ask you. Nay, do not shrink away ; you have a right to keep your own secrets. But you have given to me the right of saying to you frankly that my feelings towards Harriet Crofton are simply those of a compassionate contempt of my former love, and of the wasted years I have sacrificed to it. She has no influence over me ; or only the influence that any woman, with her opportunities, may exercise over an idle and a dreamy man. She is the wife of an old friend—that would be enough, Doris, if she were of a truth the woman I once believed her. I can scarcely see how I have been brought into such close and frequent intimacy with her and her husband, but many circumstances have thrown us together. We will neither of us speak of last night ; but these letters—you shall burn them for me, as my offering to your courage in hinting some plain and wholesome truths to me. Nay, my dear girl, I shall ask you to do it as a favour

to myself, and as a sign that you believe me when I say the old flame is as extinguished as that will be in a few minutes."

"But stay," said Doris, "listen to me for a moment longer. I must believe you, though you puzzle me; but Mrs. Crofton is not as indifferent to you as you say you are to her. I know she began to try to attract you, being jealous of me. If this engagement had been true I should have no chance against her. She is not a good woman, Dr. Lockley. She is unscrupulous. I scarcely know what I fear for you, or for myself. She has heard of all these rumours, and yet she tries to attract you still, before my very eyes, your betrothed wife, as she believes me. Women are not much deceived in one another. This is not a mere flirtation, such as they say she is accustomed to carry on; it is a deep, dangerous scheme. Oh, Paul! for the sake of Rufus; for your own sake, be careful what dealings you have with her."

She was speaking earnestly, with Paul's

face bent to hers as she knelt beside him, when the door was opened gently, and Harriet Crofton appeared in the doorway. Doris rose hastily with an air of embarrassment and chagrin, and met her as she advanced smilingly into the room. But Harriet would not permit her to pass without interference. She caught her arm, and with a bland mockery of glance at her and Paul, she addressed herself to the latter.

“Have you brought her to task about her freak last night?” she asked. “Have you told her what we heard her saying to Tom Fanshawe in the cloisters?”

Doris turned quickly to Paul, and fastened a look of indignant surprise upon his face, while her own grew blanched and terrified. He attempted to mutter some explanation; but his position confounded him. Harriet's brilliant eyes were lightening over her scattered letters, which a minute ago he was proposing to sacrifice to Doris's courage; while the latter was confronting him with an

expression of mingled apprehension and resentment, which he had never seen upon her quiet face before. He stood silent before them.

“So you listened!” said Doris, “and you know my secret. Well, I trust it to you.”

She darted from the library, Harriet's mocking laugh ringing in her ears. If she could have heard the errand that brought Mrs. Crofton to Fairfield that morning, she would have considered her most painful suspicions justified, in spite of Paul's protestations. Harriet neither spoke of Doris, nor of the letters lying under her sight, but with tears, which made her beauty tenfold greater by the softness they threw over it, and with a voice lowered into its most pathetic accents, she thanked Paul for a loan of 500*l.*, advanced to Richard Crofton to relieve him from his most immediate and most pressing claims. A day or two before, Paul would have received these thanks with courteous cordiality; but, with the words whispered by

Doris still lingering in his ears, he replied to them coldly, and Harriet had the tact to bring the embarrassing interview to a speedy termination.

More vexed with himself than any man is apt to be, no sooner was Paul alone once more than he began with critical scrutiny to review the wiles, very cunning and delicate, by which Harriet Crofton had brought him into his present position. The unwelcome rumours were not the worst, or most serious part of the case. He was not a wealthy man. Fairfield, which had been in his possession for nearly ten years, produced an annual income of 700*l.*, upon which he had been content to settle down into the literary leisure and ease, which were so congenial to him. There was, however, his younger brother to provide for ; he had made a point of setting apart each year a sum varying from 150*l.* to 200*l.* in order to meet the expense of Rufus's sojourn at college, and to form a nucleus for the provision he would probably need, before

he could expect to hold a living of his own. Of this sum, accumulated to 1800*l.*, part was invested, and the remainder had been lying at interest with his bankers in Thornbury. It was with feelings of strong dissatisfaction and self-reproach that Paul reflected upon his own weakness, and the beguilements of Harriet Crofton, which had so largely drawn upon the provision he had been making, with much carefulness and self-denial, for his young brother.

CHAPTER XV.

THE week's grace for which Tom Fanshawe had stipulated with Doris fled quickly for both him and Emma. The latter was frequently seen dissolved in tears, and looked unutterably wretched during the first few days ; but her blonde face afterwards cleared up, and wore an aspect of repose and resignation, such as had not dwelt upon it since John's death. The Croftons were urgent with Tom to delay his proposed departure, for though the season for card-parties was over, his presence and services made him a valuable ally in the occasional clandestine nights of high-play, with which he and Harriet Crofton contrived to relieve the tedium of a country life. But no entreaties could prevail upon him to stay beyond the time

he first mentioned ; he left the Priory at the end of the week, followed by the unanimous regrets of the inmates.

Very little was to be seen either of Paul or Doris ; the one shut up in the jealously-enclosed grounds of the Vicarage ; the other locked into his library, with his neglected books, and the vexing thoughts which could not be blotted out. Harriet's notes to Paul, models of diplomatic coquetry, accumulated unread at Fairfield ; for when Mrs. Margraf carried the first which arrived to her brother's retreat, he told her without opening his door, to her intense delight and gratification, that he did not wish to be troubled with it. Upon which she left it in the card-basket on the drawing-room table, where it, and its successors, lay untouched under Harriet's wrathful eyes, when at length she crossed over to Fairfield, with the intention of making her way to him through all obstacles ; an intention which was abandoned when she saw her scented and tinted missives

left neglected and unopened in the card-basket.

Since Mrs. Aspen's return Mrs. Margraf had redoubled her diligent efforts to regain her old standing as an intimate confidante and adviser. The publication of the "Monkmoor Roundelays" formed a foundation upon which she could erect many a delicate and insinuating flattery. She used them as the fulcrum of a lever, by which she could hoist the great load of Monkmoor Priory into the possession of her own family; and she spent more money than she could well spare in the purchase of the handsome volume, and its distribution among all those, whether rich or poor, who would be likely to mention it in terms of pleasure and approbation to the aged poetess. Nor did she fail, with affectionate urgency, to beg that a second volume should be selected from among the almost inexhaustible manuscripts; but Mrs. Aspen had experienced a considerable shock at the amount of her publisher's bill, as well as some

slight twinges of conscience at the hollowness of her apparent success ; and she turned a deaf ear to all such suggestions. She had fulfilled John's cherished wish, and released Paul and Doris from the promise to which they had bound themselves ; and not even the appearance of her name in the *Athenæum* could induce her to offer a second selection of her poems to the public. Still her heart warmed under the local reputation and favour which her beautifully bound and illustrated book had gained ; the lustre shed upon her, Clarissa Aspen of Monkmoor Priory, was a cheering gleam of sunshine after the darkness of the past month.

But Mrs. Margraf felt that the inheritance of Monkmoor Priory remained perilously unsettled. Mrs. Aspen, though greatly aged and broken in health since her son's death, had made no will ; and was so undecided, so wavering in her hopes and doubts concerning the marriage of Paul and Doris, that she could not determine upon making one. If

she died intestate the estate would descend to Richard Crofton as heir-at-law ; a consideration which filled Mrs. Margraf's heart with impotent rage. To her many quiet hints Mrs. Aspen replied candidly that as soon as Paul and Doris made up their minds she would make up hers. She loved them both fondly ; to dwell with them at the Priory was her dearest wish ; but if they did not marry she desired to leave the matter of her will open, until she could settle some handsome and sufficient provision upon her adopted daughter. In fact she could not readily decide upon the claims of Richard, Paul, or Rufus, if neither of the latter was to be the husband of Doris. If Paul trifled with her dear child's affections, she should feel too resentfully towards him to make him her heir.

Mrs. Aspen was more confidential with Mrs. Margraf upon this topic than with any one else. She could not dwell upon it either with Doris or Paul, though it occupied her

thoughts greatly. But all she said tended to make Mrs. Margraf more and more anxious to promote her original fraud into an actual fact; or so to extricate Doris from it as to make it possible for Rufus to renew his old suit. Either for Paul or Rufus, Doris, upon whom hung the inheritance of Monkmoor, must be gained. She remembered with anguish the craft she had used to divert Rufus's affection, and to prevent Doris reciprocating it. The few years of difference in their ages appeared, in this new light, such a very trifle that she was amazed that any one of them could have reckoned it a disparity. She endeavoured to probe the heart of Doris, but it was impenetrable to her wiliest advances. Paul's was not a whit more vulnerable. They were both encased in adamant against her. Night after night the owner of Monkmoor Priory lay down to sleep intestate; and the heir-at-law was Richard Crofton.

It was characteristic of Emma's tranquil egotism, that she never doubted for a moment

that the succession of her husband's rights were secured to her. She knew vaguely that her mother-in-law was the owner of the estate; but then she was her son's widow, and of course poor John would desire her to inherit his claims. The plots of Mrs. Margraf, and the chances of the Croftons, would have appeared ridiculous to her if they had ever occurred to her thoughts. She was getting accustomed to set aside Mrs. Aspen, or to regard her rather as a troublesome encumbrance, a dowager pensioner, upon the estate, from which she received too large an income. So secure was Emma in her possession of the place where she ruled as mistress, that not a shadow of uncertainty or anxiety crossed her mind; so fully did she realize her position as Mrs. Aspen of Monkmoor Priory, that no syllable fell from her lips which could lead Tom Fanshawe to suspect that she held her tenure upon any other footing than that of having succeeded to all poor John's property.

On their part the Croftons felt that their

succession was the merest chance in the world; but they had lived so long upon chances that this was strong enough to buoy up their hopes when they sank the lowest. They had no hope that Mrs. Aspen would bequeath the inheritance to them, but they guessed that no will had been made since John's death. Harriet, with feminine instinct, felt sure that Mrs. Aspen would not make one, until Paul's intentions with regard to Doris became more decided. It was another weighty motive for keeping him vacillating and uncertain; or better still, for binding him to herself, and subduing him to her influence. Mrs. Aspen looked upon her with jealous dislike and mistrust. The more skilfully she could pursue and complete her conquest over Paul, yet so as still to prevent an open rupture between him and Doris, the less probability would there be of a last and final testament being drawn up.

Such were the chances of the inheritance of Monkmoor Priory.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE central weeks of the summer passed away quietly to all; but with a sultry dulness to Harriet Crofton, which she bore with feverish impatience. Immediately after Tom Fanshawe's departure, Emma had gone on a long visit to Leamington, where her own family and friends resided, leaving Harriet in charge of the Priory, whither no more relays of guests came to while away the tedious hours. The truth was that the Priory was getting a doubtful name as a visiting-place; careful or jealous wives forbade their husbands to resort thither; while the simple country gentlemen themselves, having been once fleeced, though with the adroit and elegant craft of Harriet Crofton and Tom Fanshawe, did not choose to submit to a second opera-

tion. It was pleasant but perilous ; and they were willing to forego the pleasure, in a wholesome dread of the peril.

Harriet would have cared for none of them, if she could have retained a firm hold upon Paul ; but he also was shy. He presented himself but rarely, and then always in the company of Rufus, who was at home for the long vacation. They were kindly and friendly to her ; both of them ; with a recognition of her relationship to them running through all their intercourse with her, which gave a certain latent tenderness to their manner that at times deceived her, until she found her little aggressive arts repulsed by the courteous coldness into which they could withdraw themselves. For hours together, while her husband was rambling over the farm, and superintending the failure of his new and expensive schemes, she sat in baneful solitude in the oriel window, her clouded yet beautiful face looking across the river to Paul's home at Fairfield, while her memory

brooded over dangerous remembrances, and her fancy painted hazardous scenes of the future.

Rufus had come home with a more settled gravity and reticence of manner than had even characterised him before. It was a question whether his manhood would not become moody and ungenial ; tinctured with an austere asceticism, which would exclude him from many innocent enjoyments. The self-abnegation that was needed for him to give up his cherished affection for Doris was beginning to tinge every action of his life so deeply that he allowed himself so meagre and lenten a diet of pleasure as to threaten with famine all the more cordial emotions of his warm-hearted nature. It made Mrs. Margraf's heart ache to feel the cold kiss with which he just touched her cheek, and to see the brief, nerveless shake he gave to Paul's hand. The current of the boy's life was stagnating ; its great springs of hope and joy having been arrested or congealed in their

first buoyant flow. Only in the presence of Doris there came back a transient glow of the old single-hearted, simple boyishness, which laid his whole spirit before her in transparent loyalty and devotion. But he forbore to seek her society ; he never seemed restless for her appearance ; except that when she addressed him he woke up into a more vivid animation, he remained, even at her side, the same languid, silent, cloud-enveloped dreamer he was in her absence. But even this fitful and transient warmth was numbed into a frost-bound winter, after Paul, in a rare mood of bitter confidence, had told him of the clandestine and mysterious meeting of Doris with Tom Fanshawe in the Priory ruins.

It did not escape Doris's observation that some concealed anxiety was preying upon Mrs. Aspen's spirits ; and that the gloom deepened after each one of the private and prolonged interviews which Richard Crofton had lately held with her. She was absent and distraught, though she maintained the

state and ceremony of her position as a guest under the hospitable roof of Mr. Vale. Richard Crofton himself wore a downcast and depressed look, and visited the Vicarage with the air of a culprit. There were rumours already of some of his more distinguished failures in his scientific experiments, for the tongues of the old labourers upon the Priory lands discussed them freely; yet these losses were not sufficient to account for the declension of Mrs. Aspen's health. Mrs. Margraf remarked, with unfeigned alarm, the same symptoms of decay; but none of her entreaties prevailed to fathom the secret of her aunt's disquietude, or to induce her to avail herself of Paul's medical skill. And yet—Mrs. Margraf felt broken-hearted at the thought—no will was made to secure the inheritance from falling into the greedy hands of [the Croftons.

Half the fervid month of August was spent; the month so joyous with the joy of coming harvest last year, when John Aspen strode

proudly through his golden cornfields, and his mother grew pensive with the burden of another harvest hymn. There had been no rural pleasures in this harvest ; it seemed a fitting thing that the hay should have been gathered in by machinery, instead of by the gay bands of hay-makers, who had been wont to laugh and sing in the meadows round the ancient Priory. It was towards the end of the month when Mrs. Aspen sent a request to Paul that he would drive her over to Thornbury alone, leaving both Doris and Mrs. Margraf behind. It was an unusual event. To all of them it was evident, as she took her seat in Mr. Vale's old-fashioned chariot, and drew her crape veil closely over her face, that some new and heavy care was oppressing her. Paul placed himself beside her in silence, and drove slowly along the road skirting the bank of the river, across which lay the Priory in a flood of August sunshine, which brought out every light and shadow of the ruins in bold relief. The grain

was ripening into brown gold in the cornfields upon both sides of the stream, but John's glistening eye had not surveyed them, and could never more look upon their rustic wealth. The new-shaped ricks of hay within the arches of the chapel bore witness that they had not been piled under his direction. It would have been ill for him to come back again. Short as the time was ; a few, poor, paltry months ; it had wrought such changes that his return, like the return of most of the dead, would have produced only dire confusion. An empty place cannot be kept for those who have passed away. Time, by its own agency alone, makes such a resurrection of the dead impossible, by sweeping away the sorry shreds of that which had once been the clothing of their lives. Yet the mother, gazing across to her old and desolated home, felt heart-sick for the presence and protection of her son. She pressed her trembling hand upon her dim and tearful eyes.

“I am to take his place,” said Paul, gently,

divining the thoughts which were passing through Mrs. Aspen's aching brain.

"But you have not, Paul," she replied with a sob that bore a heavy reproach to his conscience. "You could not altogether fill my son's place; but in many, many things you have not done what you might."

"I know it," said Paul, in a tone of bitterness, "but I have been tied by my own folly. Heaven knows what a vexation and misery the last few months have been to me."

His voice spoke so deeply of regret and self-reproach, that Mrs. Aspen looked up into his gloomy face. He was gazing across to the Priory. In the oriel window she could see the figure of Harriet Crofton, leaning through its mullioned casement, waving her handkerchief after them, as they passed out of sight in the windings of the road.

"An evil day was it for us all when the Priory opened its doors to admit that woman!" cried Mrs. Aspen, a gleam of poesy flashing across her mind, faint hints of some

poem beginning to stir in the chambers of her imagination, "Woe befal the hour when her step was heard in its halls!" "But you are no youth, Paul, to be beguiled by mere flattering beauty and fair locks——"

"I am not," he interrupted. "Believe me, aunt, I held Doris Arnold as immeasurably superior to Harriet Crofton."

"Held!" echoed Mrs. Aspen, "do you mean that you do not now hold her as superior to that creature! Oh, Paul! do not tell me that you have altogether lost your affection for my Doris."

"Our engagement is at an end!" he answered, with brevity both of words and tone.

"At an end!" she cried, "is it quite ended, Paul? Can there be no reconciliation? Oh, I feared this, when you ceased your visits to the Vicarage, and when I saw the trace of tears so often upon Doris's face. My poor Doris! my poor, dear child! Paul Lockley, I could have forgiven all the rest, but this I never can forgive!"

She was shivering with excitement, and her voice rose into a shrill quaver, so unlike her usually calm and measured diction, that Paul's conscience smote him again poignantly.

"My dear aunt," he said, "Doris has long wished it so. The contract was hasty and ill-considered ; we did not know one another. I have left it with her to make the cessation of it public, for what blame may arise I am willing to bear. Not a shadow of it attaches to her. You must have seen long since that our position was full of pain and misunderstanding."

"On your side only, Paul Lockley," she said, excitedly ; "not on hers. If you had loved my Doris as simply and purely as she loves you, there would have been neither pain nor misunderstanding. Yes, the blame rests upon you ; upon you and Harriet Crofton."

"Nay, aunt," he answered, quietly and sadly, "ask Doris herself. She does not love me. I know it for a certainty ; but I have

no right to lay my proofs before you or anyone. She will not deny it, if you ask her. My esteem, my regard for Doris was greater than I could tell you."

It was impossible to mistake the sincere and regretful accents of his voice, and the expression of keen disappointment which rested upon his features as he spoke of Doris. Mrs. Aspen's hands were locked together in a gesture of deep distress.

"Oh, Paul!" she said, "my dear John did so rejoice in it, and I have built upon it so long. Even now I thought you and Doris would not refuse me a shelter. It is another home swept away. Soon there may be no kindly roof beneath which I may lay my grey head."

"What do you mean?" asked Paul, anxiously; for though Mrs. Aspen was prone to indulge in a poetic license of speech, there was an earnestness in her grief, which arrested his attention.

"It is probable that I shall soon lose the

Priory," she replied, regaining, with an effort, her accustomed stateliness of mien. "I have invested a few thousands in an unfortunate speculation; and the result may be beggary and ruin."

She sat upright in the chariot, her head raised with an imposing air of calm courage; her eyes, a little dimmed with recent tears, looking straight forward to the spires of Thornbury.

"Good heavens, aunt!" cried Paul, bringing the horse to a sudden stop, "what can you mean? The Priory lost! An unfortunate speculation! Beggary and ruin!"

"It is what I wish to speak to you about," she answered, unfalteringly; "drive on, Paul. If John had been alive of course it would not have happened. You are no man of business, and Richard Crofton seemed to be; still if you had been with us in London, I should never have acted without your advice. But you were not, Paul; and Richard came more than once urging me about this business.

John had managed to save a few thousands, between five and six, to buy the farm of Westlands ; and it lay ready for the purchase in Rock's Bank. I was anxious to make a good investment of it, poor John's own savings, to settle it, and an equal sum, upon Emma, before I returned to live at the Priory, as I thought to do when you and Doris were married, Paul. It would have made a fair portion for my poor John's widow. Richard Crofton assured me this was the very best investment I could make. The shares, which were offered for sale only from sheer necessity, were realizing nearly eleven per cent."

Mrs. Aspen faltered a little, but she recovered herself bravely, and a weak, mournful smile played about her mouth for an instant.

"I am not afraid of beggary and ruin," she said. "That was only my mode of speech. I know my little failings, and how kindly you all bear with them. Richard was sanguine, and very eager to secure the shares that were

in the market ; and I withdrew the money from Rock's Bank, where it was getting but little interest, and invested it in the Thornbury Joint Stock Banking Company. It is an unfortunate speculation, or something worse. There are not many substantial shareholders. It was only a few days ago that Richard informed me the Priory would be liable if a crash should come. I suppose they would have the right to seize everything I have in the world."

"The Priory liable!" echoed Paul, unable in the greatness of his consternation to realize the full gravity of Mrs. Aspen's statements."

"Yes," she replied, "poor Richard is a shareholder himself. He invested about 300*l.* at the same time that he bought my shares, and he will lose every penny of his property also. There is a great strain upon the resources of the bank ; but we are keeping our affairs as quiet as possible, for if a rush should come all will be lost. To-day there is a meeting of the shareholders at

Thornbury, where I wish you to be my representative, and take what care you can of my interests.

Take what care he could of her interests ! She uttered the words cheerfully ; but they stung him with the keenest censure and condemnation. He had neglected them so culpably ; he had left her, a credulous, trusting, unsuspecting woman, weighed down with age and sorrow, to become the dupe of a needy and fortune-hunting adventurer. He ought to have foreseen all this, and not have suffered the Croftons, who had fleeced him, to find an easy prey in Mrs. Aspen. Though she bore the threatening aspect of misfortune with a worthy courage ; bracing herself up, as he could see by the firm set of her lips, and the light in her eyes, to meet the worst that might result from her unfortunate investment ; he dreaded the very thought of her unlimited liability. What if she had really to give up the Priory, which had been her home, and the home of her ancestors,

through many generations? He could not bear to glance towards this last sacrifice. A thousand times he cursed his folly in permitting her affairs to fall into the hands of Richard Crofton ; and a thousand times his conscience smote him for not maintaining the filial relationship which he had promised to John upon his death-bed. An unfaithful substitute had he been ; a careless and indolent executor of John's dying charge. He could find no words to speak to Mrs. Aspen, until they were entering the streets of Thornbury.

“ My dear aunt,” he said, bending towards her with an air of protection and sympathy, “ the Priory must not be lost. No ; not if I give Fairfield for it. I am still a young man ; and can bear changes ; but you must not, you shall not be rooted out of your own place in your old age. No ; we will save Monkmoor Priory for Clarissa Aspen.”

Her own name bore a rare charm, which brought a brighter smile to her face ; but

she shook her head as she looked up at him.

“No, my dear Paul,” she said, with quivering lips, “I am only a childless widow; the last branch of the old stock; and when I die the place must go to heirs of another blood. If the stroke had to fall, better for it to fall upon me, than upon any mother who had children to be banished with her. You and Doris—no, not Doris now, I shall have to part with her—you will give me a home for the few years I have to live. If we can save anything from the wreck, it must be for poor Emma. I could not bear that my John’s poor Emmy should be unprovided for.”

Paul felt an unusual sensation of tingling tears in his eyes, but he did not attempt to answer in the noisy streets, except by a mental vow that Fairfield should be sacrificed to Monkmoor Priory. He drove Mrs. Aspen to the residence of an ancient friend, who lived in a sombre street of Thornbury, where hatchments over the doors of one or two of

the dwellings imparted a stamp of gentility and aristocracy to the gloomy-looking buildings. Leaving her there to await the result of the meeting of the shareholders, he repaired to the board-room of the Thornbury Banking Company as Mrs. Aspen's representative.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE meeting of the shareholders in the Thornbury Joint Stock Banking Company was both stormy and protracted. Richard Crofton was present, and was one of the most voluble of the speakers, pointing out how the Company ought not only to have succeeded, but also to have supplanted every other banking establishment in Thornbury. He had invested, as he told Paul in a doleful whisper, three out of the five hundred pounds which the latter had advanced to him as a loan about six weeks before, in some shares which had been offered to him privately by a partner who had wisely withdrawn from the concern; and this circumstance, proved by the scrip he held in his hand, in some measure removed the convic-

tion growing in Paul's mind, that he was an unscrupulous adventurer, who had wilfully practised upon Mrs. Aspen's credulity. Even to him, unpractised in business habits, the affairs of the bank were evidently in almost hopeless confusion. Half of the directors had already resigned their office; the one who had been most active in forming the new company, and managing its business, had taken himself out of harm's way in a trip to the Continent. The shareholders, with but few exceptions, were just such men of straw as Richard Crofton, who did not shrink from the unlimited liability of the Company, simply because they had neither credit nor property to lose in case of its failure. A few were retired tradesmen, and women of small means, who had embarked all they had accumulated in the new concern; but the wealthiest shareholder among them was Mrs. Aspen.

Paul left at the close of the conference with no anodyne for the poignant sting of

his conscience. He could not put from him the conviction that if his counsel had been asked, as it most surely would have been had he maintained an oversight of Mrs. Aspen's affairs, his judgment would have been given against this specious but doubtful investment of her money.

His solicitor, to whose office he repaired immediately, arched his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders with almost contemptuous surprise, upon hearing that so lately as four or five months ago, Mrs. Aspen had been induced to invest 6000*l.* in the Thornbury Banking Company; he saw no chance of her escaping the responsibility. It was already rumoured abroad that the bank was insolvent; and the liabilities were calculated to amount to a far larger sum than all the property of the really substantial shareholders could be worth. It would be well if they managed to pay five or six shillings in the pound. In confidence he had long since advised his clients to have

nothing to do with the Thornbury Joint Stock Banking Company.

There was no grain of comfort in his solicitor's communications ; and Paul left his office with a heavier heart. The handsome building occupied by the company stood in the principal street of the town, along which he slowly made his way. Glancing at the plate-glass window he caught a glimpse of the furrowed face of the head clerk anxiously looking at the Town-hall clock, which still marked some twenty minutes off the usual hour for closing. Two or three persons were entering stealthily, and returning with satisfied faces ; but as Paul drew nearer, he saw the under-statured and deformed artist hastening with all his powers of speed to the bank. Paul followed him in, and heard him demand the immediate settlement of his cash account.

"Your book shall be balanced to-morrow morning, Mr. Atcherley," replied the clerk, blandly.

“I cannot wait till to-morrow,” he cried, with uncontrollable excitement; “you have the sole provision I have made for my mother. Sir, I must have that 700*l.* or I will not quit this spot to-night.”

“You are too late, sir, to transact business of that nature,” was the answer. “We receive deposits until four in the afternoon; but we do not balance accounts after three.”

“I met Fortescue and Jameson only five minutes ago,” said Robert Atcherley, “and their claims had been settled. Good heavens! man! do you know that my mother is an old, blind woman? and I—you see what I am. The money is all her living, I tell you.”

“Mr. Atcherley, we cannot,” replied the clerk reluctantly, “we have not that sum in the bank. It may come in in the morning, and I swear to you, your claim shall be settled first.”

Robert Atcherley groaned aloud, and turned away without another word, so evi-

dent was it that the clerk had told the simple truth of the case. Other claimants were rushing in riotously as the town clock chimed four, but he made his way through the midst of them with a downcast head ; and scarcely gave heed to the friendly pressure of Paul's hand upon his shoulder.

"Atcherley," he said, "I followed you into the bank, and heard all. Cheer up ; things may wear a very black aspect at present ; but a good fellow like you must prosper in the long run."

"No, Dr. Lockley, no," he answered, shaking himself free from Paul's grasp. "I have been good for nothing these six months past. I could paint once, but the time is over. All the world seems changed, and as if there was nothing worth perpetuating. The very sky and earth are covered with a gloom that I cannot disperse. It was never so with me before in the fulness of summer ; and I am a young man yet ; only a few months older than Doris Arnold."

The named chafed Paul as it had always done of late ; and he walked silently and unheedingly at Atcherley's side in the direction of Murivance. The artist would have willingly foregone his companionship ; he looked from time to time into his clouded and abstracted face as he strode beside him ; but Paul was wrapped in perplexed thought, and accompanied him with mechanical indifference.

“ It is a wretched business,” he said at last. “ Mrs. Aspen is one of the principal shareholders.”

“ Yes,” answered Atcherley, bitterly, “ it was the knowledge of that which induced me to deposit my mother's money in the bank for a time. Tom Fanshawe gave me the information.”

“ Her liability may extend even to parting with the Priory,” continued Paul. “ My anxiety, Atcherley, is nearly as great as your own, and my conscience is not at ease like yours. But come, consider me your friend ;

let us weather the storm through together. You are a young man as you say ; and you will prosper yet. We are bound to shield the women belonging to us from all care and sorrow if we can. You must not burden your mother with this trouble. I wish to heaven I could keep it from Mrs. Aspen as easily."

They had come in sight of the low-roofed house at Murivance, and Paul stopped to shake Atcherley's hand heartily, as he spoke the cheering and sympathising words, which brought back a gleam of hope to the artist's face. Before the latter could reply the door opened from within, as Doris Arnold stepped out into the street ; with her veil drawn down, and without a glance either to the right or left, she walked swiftly down a lane which led to the river-side. Paul caught a glimpse of some one standing within the lobby, and kissing his hand to the retreating figure. Robert Atcherley, who had followed her with eager looks, caught an expression in

his eyes, which appeared to demand some remark from him.

“She must have called to see my mother,” he said, in a softened tone of excuse; “she comes very, very seldom. And to-day, unluckily, Tom Fanshawe is staying with me.”

Paul made no reply, but strode quickly away in the direction Doris had taken, yet vexed with himself at the impulse of jealousy and curiosity that impelled him to follow her. The lane was quiet; once or twice he saw her raise her handkerchief to her eyes, and stand for a minute or two as if to overcome the emotion that was oppressing her. At last, from a safe distance he saw Rufus row his boat up to the landing-place, and lead her carefully down the slimy steps into it. Tom Fanshawe and Rufus! He drew a swift comparison between them; and a deeper feeling of anger against her took possession of him. He watched them out of sight; then with slow and deliberative steps

he returned into the town to seek Mrs. Aspen, and acquaint her with the result of his morning's interview with her fellow-shareholders.

Paul had another interruption to encounter. At the end of the last street, he ran, in his absorbed meditation, full against Mr. Weston, his successor in his medical practice, who was standing in wait for him, as he strolled absently along the pavement. Weston had much to say on the topic of the Thornbury Banking Company, and the reports which by this time were filling everybody's mouth. But before he released Paul he gave him one strictly confidential item of gossip.

"They tell me," he said, speaking low, and looking round cautiously, "that Mrs. John Aspen is seen everywhere about Leamington with that handsome young fellow, Tom Fanshawe, who was so intimate with the Croftons all last winter. He must be several years younger than she is. They say it is

the old story of a woman's folly for a handsome lad. Why! poor Aspen has not been dead twelve months!"

"Do you suppose there is any truth in it?" asked Paul, in bewildered amazement.

"It was Mrs. Weston herself who saw them together," he answered. "She says she never saw two persons look more lover-like. Mrs. John has laid aside her mourning too. He has been there ever since she went away, and it seems that her friends receive him with great cordiality. He is an insinuating rascal at all times."

Paul passed on in greater perplexity and perturbation of mind than ever. Not having settled to his own satisfaction any one of the chafing questions which thronged his brain, he paced to and fro along the sombre street, with its gloomy and hatchmented dwellings of the decayed and dowager gentry, until there flashed across him a resolution, which had a tingling pleasure in its very thought. He would see Doris once more alone, and

take her to task about her conduct with a keen and friendly severity as great as that which she had manifested towards him in the matter of Harriet Crofton.

Having arrived at this decision, which cheered and invigorated his heart a little amid all its anxieties, he presented himself before Mrs. Aspen as if he had just left the bank. As she knew too much already to be kept in the ignorance he had prescribed for Mr. Atcherley, he told her what had passed ; but with such hopeful suggestions of possible escape from the last and worst calamity ; that of losing the Priory ; as to cause the aged poetess to shed tears of relief. They drove home together. Though Mrs. Aspen delicately avoided the mention of Doris's name, she discussed her plans for the future freely ; and they both felt that her adopted daughter must continue to be the chief comfort and solace of that future.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was with unmingled gratification that Mrs. Aspen heard Paul say in a somewhat stammering tone, when he handed her out of the chariot at the door of the Vicarage, that he wished to have a private interview with Doris, if she would persuade her to give him one. She had great confidence in the attractiveness of Doris, and in the quiet charm of her fair face ; so much fairer in her eyes than the vaunted beauty of Harriet Crofton that she could not believe but that it must be at heart more pleasing to Paul. She held her hands for a minute or two before she would let her go, while she gazed questioningly into her eyes ; and then she dismissed her with a kiss to Paul's presence, saying,—
“ My dear, he is worth winning. You might

give up a good many scruples for his sake and mine. And as for Harriet Crofton, he has long ceased to care a straw for her."

Paul was waiting for Doris in Mr. Vale's study ; a pleasant room framed in with rose-trees, which hung round the lattice windows, and shed a green and rosy tinge into the quiet apartment. He was wondering vaguely how she would meet him, and what words she would utter. Would she stand like a culprit before him, while he spoke calmly and judiciously to her ? Or would he, Paul Lockley, adopting her position in their last interview, kneel at her side and whisper his accusations, gentle ones they should be, into her ear ? He was lost in a half-pleasant reverie, when the door was opened, and Doris entered, very calm and self-possessed, and perfectly at ease. He thought his eyes were fixed upon her with a look of keen penetration and severity ; but she met his gaze with as much composure, as if she had been spend-

ing the innocent hours among the children in the village-school.

“Miss Arnold,” he said, “I wish to inform you that about an hour ago I saw you leaving Mr. Atcherley’s house at Muri-vance.”

“Yes,” she answered, quietly, folding her hands over one another; “and what then?”

What then? Paul felt himself completely worsted. It occurred to him that he had no right to ask any question, or to utter any reproach. It was only another proof, if such were needed, of his incapacity to understand women, or to deal with them. He expected Doris to tremble, and to drop her blushing face into her concealing hands; yet there she stood, gazing calmly at him, and asking in a tone of some surprise, “What then?”

“I saw,” he stammered, “I saw Tom Fanshawe!”

“I suppose so,” she said, with a flash of fire in her eyes. “It is unnecessary for Dr.

Lockley to inform me that he makes himself a spy upon my actions."

"A spy, Doris?" exclaimed Paul.

"A spy," she repeated. "I believed you were an honourable man, until I heard that you had followed us, you and Mrs. Crofton, and listened to our conversation in the cloisters. But all men are alike," she added, with a gesture as if she renounced the whole sex; "they can every one of them stoop to mean and paltry actions when there is any temptation to commit them."

"I assure you," he answered, "I solemnly assure you, I should have seen and heard nothing but for Harriet. She led me there without telling me the reason. I was so amazed, Doris, so spell-bound, that I never thought of the dishonour of my conduct."

Doris smiled incredulously.

"What can I say to you?" he continued, with extreme earnestness, "I am many years older than you are; and circumstances; my brother's devoted attachment to you; have

made you deeply interesting to me. Bear with me for a minute while I tell you I am afraid you are being deceived. Weston tells me, upon his wife's authority, that Tom Fanshawe is Emma Aspen's declared suitor. He has been with her at Leamington ever since she left home."

The abrupt announcement had quite as great an effect as Paul had anticipated. The colour fled from Doris's cheeks and lips, and her eyes closed for an instant, but opened again with a look of great alarm.

"Oh, Dr. Lockley!" she exclaimed, "it must be prevented. It was what I was most afraid of. He told me at Murivance that he had never written to her; I did not imagine he had been at Leamington. I could never have forgiven myself if this had happened. And you ought never to have forgiven yourself. Did not Mr. Aspen give her into your charge? and what have you done to guard her against marrying an unknown adventurer? She is so foolish, poor thing! Oh, if she had mar-

ried him it would have been partly your fault."

More faults laid to the charge of Paul Lockley! He looked in speechless amazement upon Doris, whose aspect changed rapidly from alarm to energy, and then settled into repose again.

"But he will not marry her now," she continued, with a faint smile. "I have prevented that. He thought the Priory belonged to her, until I undeceived him to-day. Of course he does not really care for her, a woman so much older than himself, and so silly! But I am ashamed of talking about him to you."

She hung her head a little now, and moved towards the door; but Paul pronounced her name again in a hesitating voice, that arrested her steps. She paused, looking across at him as he stood, nervously plucking off the scented leaves of a geranium in the window.

"Doris—Miss Arnold," he said, meeting her gaze for a moment, "to-day I informed

Mrs. Aspen that our engagement was at an end."

It was her turn to be embarrassed and unnerved ; and as she stood before him with averted eyes, and a face, which varied with conflicting expressions, he listened eagerly for her first words.

"I am very glad," she said, sighing ; "but neither of us can undo the wrong we have done. It was a foolish and base fraud ; and I am afraid we do not yet know all the mischief it has wrought. We have both misled and misunderstood one another through it. Still we may be friends, Dr. Lockley ?" She had retraced her steps to his side, and held out her hand to him timidly, with a faint colour rising to the soft folds of her fair hair. He took her hand in his, and held it lightly but firmly, while he read her changeful face with an absent contemplation, which made her eyelids droop, and the flush deepen into crimson.

"Rufus is so changed !" she murmured,

with a painful throbbing of her heart. "I know you have told my secret to him ; and he punishes me for it, as if I had been bound to make it known to you all. But none of you had any right to know it. I came here only as a stranger ; a hired companion ; and you had no claim to hear the secret trouble of my life. Perhaps I ought to have confided it to Mrs. Aspen, when she became so fond of me ; but I could not bear to tell her what I was ashamed of."

Doris spoke wistfully, as if desirous to hear Paul assent to her words. He dropped her hand as the low tones of her voice ceased and retreated a step or two from her.

"I wish you had told me," he answered regretfully ; " but, as you say, I had no claim upon your confidence. Doris, though circumstances have been so much against me, that you have never known me for what I am, yet believe me I have a true friend's interest in you ; a brother's, if you like the term. I am not fit to handle any delicate

subject ; but let me counsel you, blunt and harsh as it may sound, not to waste yourself upon that fellow. I do not ask you to tell me anything about him ; I heard enough to know that you are willing to make many sacrifices for him, though he is so utterly unworthy, and despises your affection. Cannot you feel it for yourself ? Cannot you foresee what the end must be ?”

“ Yes,” answered Doris, in great distress. “ I have seen it all, for a long time ; but what can I do ? How can I cease caring for him ? How could I give him up ?”

Her voice failed altogether, and she stood before Paul sobbing vehemently, in such a passion of sorrow as he had never before witnessed in her. He felt himself strangely moved by it, and his tones fell into a tender and compassionate accent as he said, “ My poor girl ! my poor Doris !”

“ You don't know what he used to be,” she whispered, as if to herself, “ so good and clever ! I think sometimes, if I had been a

little different, a little more gay and lively, he would not have got into bad company. I must have more patience yet, and try to win him back. You see we have not means to take the position in life that he is fitted for ; and I have so few ways of getting money. But he will come right at last. Do not bid me give up all hope."

She turned away without waiting for his answer, and hastened from the room, leaving Paul with a feeling of blank disappointment and fretting vexation at his heart. He had entertained no definite expectations concerning the result of this conversation, but in some way it appeared a failure to him. He had grown to like the fragile tie which linked him to Doris with her gentle, tranquillizing ways, and low, bashful murmur of speech, whenever he had been thrown upon her companionship, in consequence of the presumed relations they held. But this shadow of a love, which from the customs and usages of long months had assumed something of the reality of a

substance, had fled away ; had left him with a sense of forlorn solitariness, that would follow him into his library, and haunt him coldly in the midst of his most profound pursuit. For a little while he lingered, as if in a faint hope of her return, in the becalmed and uninvaded sanctuary of the old Vicar's study, where the door had never opened at the touch of a wife's hand, or the floor been trodden by the tottering feet of children. With a sigh of heavy dissatisfaction, Paul made his escape through the window : glancing round for a glimpse of Doris, and listening for a moment to catch the sound of her voice, he returned slowly to the quiet and unruffled home, which had so long contented him.

It had been a day of unmingled excitement and anxiety for Mrs. Margraf, ever since Mrs. Aspen's remarkable summons had been sent to Paul in the morning. She had not a doubt that the final destination of Monkmoor Priory was to be decided ; but so

completely at a loss was she as to her aunt's intentions, that during Paul's absence, her mind swung giddily from hope to fear, and her reason travelled in a circle of inconclusive and fruitless conjecture. She had weighed, with painful and trembling exactness, all the claims that hereditary descent, or sentimental remembrance of her son, might urge upon Mrs. Aspen, in favour of the Croftons and Emma. Having trusted that these would be set aside by the superior love she felt for Paul and Rufus, and her hope that one of them would be the husband of her adopted daughter, Mrs. Margraf wavered with intolerable suspense between the chances of their inheritance. Never had she been so completely at fault; never so baffled by the working of her own schemes. For some time past she had been playing a game in the dark; and to-day a bold move was being made, altogether beyond her control or influence, which would either make it a lost game to her, or throw it once for all into her hands.

It augured well that Paul had been Mrs. Aspen's charioteer.

She was self-possessed enough to meet Paul with smooth sisterliness, and to sit through the prolonged dinner-hour, without plying him with questions, though he was gloomy and pre-occupied, and replied to the remarks made by her and Rufus in an absent manner. When the meal was over, Paul drew nearer to Rufus, and looked keenly, and with a more clouded face, into his inquiring eyes.

"Rufus, my boy," he said, laying his hand fondly upon his young brother's shoulder, "I have had a talk with Doris this morning, and it is all over between us."

"Oh, Paul! Paul!" was all that Rufus could utter.

"She is not to blame," continued Paul, tenderly. "She said it had been a secret trouble to her; Doris's secret trouble, Rufus. We knew she had one, and it was that. An old love, and unworthy; but from which she

cannot free herself, though it is a misery to her. Boy, a woman's nature is a strange mystery."

"But she deceived you," answered Rufus, "she has deceived us all. Paul, you do not know what an angel I thought her—" and the boy's voice faltered with uncontrollable agitation.

"Paul!" exclaimed Mrs. Margraf, "Paul, does my aunt know? Have you told her that your engagement to Doris is ended?"

"I told her this morning as we drove to Thornbury," replied Paul.

"As you drove to Thornbury!" echoed Mrs. Margraf, "good gracious! what a difference it may have made!"

Paul scarcely heard her remark, but he invited Rufus to come out with him on to the terrace. As the sun set gorgeously, with the massive thunder-clouds of an August evening gathering upon the western horizon, they walked together, in such close and confidential conversation, as had not been exchanged be-

tween them for many months. Yet in the very freedom of their apparent unreserve, each avoided with delicate caution the topic which he believed to be the deepest sorrow of the other ; and neither of them pronounced the beloved name of Doris.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. MARGRAF was not kept in long suspense as to the fate of the Priory. The news of the failure of the Thornbury Banking Company spread like wildfire through the country, with confused rumours of the names of the shareholders, and the extent of their liability. Before the close of the next day condoling friends arrived in successive relays at the Vicarage to sympathize with the aged owner of the Priory. Their visits corroborated the reports which Mrs. Margraf at first steadily refused to believe. But it was not until Mrs. Aspen herself confessed to her, calmly and with peerless dignity, the foolish speculation into which she had been betrayed by Richard Crofton, that she could give real credence to this unimaginable catastrophe. Then her

spirit succumbed at once ; crumbled its air-built castles ; and sitting desolately amidst their ruins, bewailed itself with a frank and candid bitterness, at complete variance with the smooth philosophy of her principles.

She hated Doris, the innocent cause of the calamity. Hitherto she had maintained that hatred was no element in the constitution of natures, calm and superior like her own. The tranquillity of a cultivated life, such as that in which her family existed, afforded neither temptation nor opportunity for the working of violent passions, and she had smiled coldly upon the vulgar scandal that Paul loved Harriet Crofton with anything of the old flame. Run through the whole list of vices, and not one of them would lurk behind the pure morality of their house ; no single stamp of the cloven foot could be found in all the track of their excellent lives ; there was no plot of wild oats in the good soil of their fenced-in ground. As for herself there was not a spot upon the blank whiteness of her

life ; her heart, beating with even tenor, had never been stirred to any discordant turmoil. But she found herself hating Doris with savage detestation. But for her, and the fatal, grand mistake of her false betrothal to Paul, the Croftons would never have been admitted within the prohibited walls of the Priory. John's death, if he had died, but that also was owing to Doris, would have left Mrs. Aspen in simple and complete dependence upon Paul's care ; and Richard Crofton would have had no power to beguile her into her miserable investment.

Towards Mrs. Aspen Mrs. Margraf's feelings were singularly blended. There was a strong sentiment of indignation and contempt for the folly, which had wrecked the rich property that ought to have descended to her house, and there was a tinge of supercilious pity for the poverty to which she would be reduced. But so dignified was the aged gentlewoman, so lofty and heroic in her brave endurance of a trouble she could never have

contemplated, that even Mrs. Margraf's worldly spirit caught a glow of admiration and reverence. Mrs. Aspen would permit no invectives against Richard Crofton. Whatever might have been his original motive in persuading her to purchase the unfortunate shares, there was no doubt of his intense and abject regret at the result. Paul himself, after a long and searching conversation with him, in which he took little pains to disguise his suspicions, exonerated him from all dishonest and vicious designs ; he gladdened the heart of Mrs. Aspen, by assuring her that her kinsman ; he in whose veins flowed the blood of her ancestors ; had not been guilty of any wilful treachery to herself. Upon receiving his grave affirmation that Richard Crofton had been more sinned against than sinning, she sent over to the Priory for him and Harriet, and received them with an affectionate graciousness, such as she had never before displayed to them.

As soon as the affairs of the Thornbury

Banking Company came to be investigated, the sacrifice of Monkmoor Priory grew an absolute certainty. Great was the consternation caused by the news as it rang through the country town and its neighbourhood. The ruins formed one of the lions of Thornbury ; and the ownership of them had placed Mrs. Aspen in a position higher than her modest income of eight or nine hundred a year would have secured to her. She was intimately known by all the people of the town, who had been accustomed from their childhood to row up the beautiful river to where the shadow of the broken columns trembled upon the stream ; and there landing, to stroll through the open portions of the ancient Priory ; often meeting with the tall and regal old lady, with her erect bearing and snow-white hair, who had at once commanded their respectful greeting, and returned it with courteous grace. To many among them she was the object of a kind of literary piety ; they did homage to the

sovereignty of letters by a voluntary reverence to their own local representative of it, whose verses had been published in the Poet's Corner of their newspapers, as long back as the memory of man could reach. That Monkmoor Priory should positively come to the hammer, and be knocked down to any upstart and vulgar purchaser, who might close the ruins against all pleasure parties, fell like a general calamity upon the inhabitants of Thornbury.

It was Paul's fixed intention, of which at present he said nothing, that this final calamity should be averted by himself becoming the purchaser, though he would have to part with Fairfield to raise the necessary funds. But without the advowson to the Vicarage, Fairfield was worth considerably less than the Priory estate; and his purpose was to borrow the sum that would be wanting upon mortgage. He would himself return to the practice of his profession for the residue of Mrs. Aspen's life, and begin again its arduous

and responsible duties. The sacrifice would be very great ; but Paul acknowledged with acute self-reproach that his negligence of her interests, and the indolence he had indulged with respect both to his own affairs and hers, had brought this heavy loss upon her. His agreement with Mr. Weston precluded him from practising again within ten miles of Thornbury. With all his strong attachment to old localities, and his desire for a life of learned leisure, he found himself, when closely verging upon forty years of age, thrust back into the strife and turmoil from which he had made a glad escape. He said nothing, for he had no one to whom he could entrust a purpose, which must be kept secret until it was irrevocably completed. But when he saw Doris cheerful and hopeful ; comforting and supporting Mrs. Aspen with quiet courage and sympathy, which did not refuse to look at the very worst aspect of the impending trial, but discovered some brightness in its dreariest prospect ; he was filled with an

almost irrepressible longing for the old compact, frail and false as it was, which would yet have given him a right to demand a private conversation with her ; when he could have confided all his plans of self-sacrifice to her ear, while he could watch the dawn of approbation in her smiling eyes.

Amidst the general trouble the announcement that Paul's engagement to Doris was ended caused little agitation, excited little notice, except in the hearts of Harriet Crofton and Rufus. The former felt a thrill and rapture of exultation, for she could come to no other conclusion than that her influence over Paul had effected this separation, which seemed to bring him nearer to herself. She thought she knew him well enough to be sure that having once more stooped to the solace of a woman's love and sympathy he would not have the power to resume his indifference and contempt for her sex. He would need the sweetly-flavoured draught again ; and it required only a little delicate management to

make him seek her for the perilous refreshment. The renewed and increased cordiality with which Mrs. Aspen treated her and her husband, as if to make amends for the suspicions under which they had rested, gave her better and more frequent opportunities for exercising her fascinations over Paul.

It was at the close of some days of painful deliberation that Paul determined to take Rufus into his confidence, as being the only one who had a direct though distant claim to the inheritance of Fairfield. The brothers met in the library, where the portrait of Doris still hung over the hearth as Rufus had left it, for Paul had not cared to displace it. The boy, who loved her, sighed bitterly as he glanced at it, and hid his eyes from wandering to it by shading them with his hand.

“Rufus,” said Paul, “I have some business of importance to consult you about. You recollect poor John left his mother to my care, and I promised to be as a son to her. How I have neglected and broken that pro-

mise you know, not intentionally, but through my weak indolence. I have left her to the influence of a man, half rogue and half fool, and whom I knew to be both ; the consequences are what I ought to have foreseen. My boy, I can neither sleep at night nor read by day for the pricking of my conscience. If that poor old lady—a woman, Rufus, and of our kindred—should be turned out of the house of her forefathers, I could never lift up my head as an honourable man again.”

“Nor could I,” replied Rufus, without removing his hand.

“There is only one plan to adopt,” pursued Paul, “and I want your consent and concurrence in it. My scheme for you has been that you should continue your studies at Cambridge, until you had won a name there ; for you will gain fame and reputation, Rufus, and for that I have laid by about two hundred a year since I came to Fairfield. It had accumulated into a good sum ; but lately

withdrew £500 of it. Still there will be more than enough for you to take your time at college before entering orders. After that I hoped you would come home, and live here at Fairfield again as Mr. Vale's curate."

Rufus looked up between his fingers at Doris's portrait. Paul's eye detecting the stolen glance, followed it, and dwelt upon the face with an expression of regret and discontent.

"I shall never marry," he said. "I have always regarded you as my heir, Rufus. Now my only way of saving the Priory is to part with Fairfield, and to purchase it. Fairfield is of nearly equal value, but I must keep the next presentation to the living for you; so I can only buy the Priory, subject to a mortgage of a few thousands, the interest of which I must pay myself. Now, Rufus, I must either give it over to my aunt for her life, after which it would return to us; or I must altogether relinquish it, leaving it in her

power to will it as she pleases. What shall I do ? ”

“ Give it up without reservation,” said Rufus, with a glow of animation.

“ You are right, Ruf,” replied Paul ; “ the sacrifice must be a complete one. You will be provided for, until you can take orders ; and there will be the Vicarage for you upon Mr. Vale’s death.”

“ But what do you mean to do with yourself and Sophia ? ” asked Rufus.

“ Ah ! ” he said, assuming an air of indifference, “ Sophia and I can go back to the old business. I have not yet lost all my skill and knowledge. But I shall have to borrow two or three hundred of your stock, Rufus, to start upon ; and then we shall get on swimmingly. It will do me good, my boy. I have been rusting out here. Doris despises me.”

The last words escaped Paul’s lips unintentionally, being only one of the many stray ideas which floated about his intended pur-

pose ; but they had a strong effect upon Rufus. A moment before he was full of eager sympathy and admiration for his brother, which his heart burned to put into words ; but it was occupied instantly with conflicting and torturing thoughts about Doris. Paul felt a little chilled at the blank indifference with which he heard of the breaking-up of his old' and favourite pursuits ; and he looked in vain for the gladdening approbation he sought. Perhaps it would have been different, he thought, if he could have taken counsel of Doris.

He left Rufus in the library, and immediately ordered his horse to ride over to Thornbury.

A fortnight had not elapsed since he had driven Mrs. Aspen thither ; yet how complete a revolution had been effected in his own concerns and hers ! The Priory looked as lovely as then ; Harriet Crofton was leaning out of the oriel-window as if it were but the same summer morning. He reined in his

horse to hear her voice, clear and musical as a bell, ringing across the water, as she asked him to do some errand for her in Thornbury, which would necessitate his return by the Priory. It was useless to attempt evading her wiles. Paul smiled savagely at himself, as he lifted his hat, and bowed attention to her commands. It was one great element of his chivalry, which had been always coexistent with his professed misanthropy, that it demanded no peerless virtue or nobility in womanhood, but extended its almost tender reverence towards every one of the sex, though proved to be foolish, frail, or dangerous. He might fume at himself ; at the misconceptions under which he laboured ; but neither Harriet Crofton's transparent coquetry, nor the gossiping tongues of all the scandalmongers in Thornbury, could make him swerve from the courtesy to which he considered her to be entitled as a woman.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. PALMER, the junior partner in the firm of Rock and Company, the wealthiest and longest established bankers in Thornbury, was as intimate a friend as Paul Lockley, in the preferred isolation of his life, possessed. Their intercourse was upon such terms of easy and good understanding that, though at times some months might slip by without either of them seeking the society of the other, yet upon meeting again they resumed the cordial interchange of free familiarity, as if it had not suffered so long an interruption. Now and then Mr. Palmer had a turn at rowing up to Fairfield whenever he had a leisure hour or two, and there invading Paul's retirement; and the latter had capricious seasons in which he could not pass through

Thornbury without penetrating into the banker's private room. Of late there had been a longer cessation than usual in their sociability. As Paul entered the bank, he recollected, with some keen tingling of his nerves, that their last conversation had turned upon Harriet Crofton, whom Mr. Palmer had known during the period of her betrothal to himself; and upon Doris Arnold, for whom his friend expressed a very strong admiration, and congratulated him heartily upon his good fortune in winning her. He became suddenly conscious also of a marked coldness of manner with which Mr. Palmer had recognised him in a hurried meeting in the streets one day; and he passed through the public room of the bank to his friend's apartment beyond with some embarrassment and hesitation.

To a shy and very reserved man, such as Paul had become by his voluntary separation from the scenes and interests of every-day life, nothing could be more disquieting than

the idea that his affairs, and character, and conduct, were being made the topics of common gossip and tale-bearing. In passing through the town he avoided all the principal thoroughfares, and threaded his way to the square where Rock's bank was situated, through narrow alleys, and blind-looking passages, with which as a young doctor he had become well acquainted. But he shrank from encountering his friend's altered or inquisitive glance, and from being compelled to lay his plans open before him. It was therefore with the stiffness and frigidity of nervous embarrassment that he addressed Mr. Palmer ; and that gentleman infused no more warmth into his own manner ; a change which Paul felt keenly.

In a few brief and concise words Paul requested to know what his balance with the bank might be. Mr. Palmer, summoning a clerk, desired that Dr. Lockley's account might forthwith be made up. After which an awkward silence threatened to fall upon

them, which was warded off by Mr. Palmer expressing a regret for Mrs. Aspen's unfortunate investment.

"I was never so amazed in my life," said Paul. "No mention was made of it to me, until a few days ago, when a meeting of the shareholders was called. I could never have supposed Mrs. Aspen would take so serious a step without asking my advice."

"Do you mean that you did not agree to it?" exclaimed Mr. Palmer. "I expostulated with Mr. Crofton as earnestly as my position would allow me; and he assured me you were perfectly satisfied with the investment; that Mrs. Aspen acted by your counsel as well as his own."

"Impossible!" cried Paul. "I did not hear a syllable of it till the other day."

"We had some grave suspicions at the time," continued Mr. Palmer, "and I said more against the withdrawal of the sum than I would have done for any one else. I even drove over to Fairfield, but you had just

started for London, Miss Arnold being very ill. As Crofton had the requisite authority from Mrs. Aspen, and was urgent to purchase some shares then in the market, we could do no other than hand over the money to him. It was only a few thousands. They lived up to their income at the Priory during poor Aspen's life."

"And since," added Paul, reflectively.

"And since," repeated Mr. Palmer, with a keen and curious glance at him. "Come, Lockley, bear a little plain speaking from an old friend. How a good and sensible fellow like you could be entrapped into such doings as those carried on at the Priory since last Christmas, puzzles me. There is some diablerie in it. Harriet Crofton and a gambling-table! I could have sworn that you would have had nothing to do with either."

"Gambling!" cried Paul; "why, Palmer, I never once sat down at a card-table there. To tell the truth, I heard some rumours of

high play, and of some rather disgraceful scenes which occurred two or three nights that I was absent. You heard the story of Sutton of Sutton? I found my presence was a check, and I went over oftener than I should have done otherwise to prevent a repetition of such scenes in Mrs. Aspen's old home. I had no other authority while Mrs. John Aspen was there as mistress. It would almost break my aunt's heart to hear of it."

"But did you not draw cheques upon us for the amount of your losses?" asked Mr. Palmer, "small some times; high at others. I never supposed they were anything else, being held by the persons who presented them to us."

"You were mistaken," replied Paul smiling, yet with an uneasy recollection of the £500 he had withdrawn for the Croftons. "I was here myself some time in May to take out a rather large amount for a prudent fellow like me; but except that, and my usual cheques, which would come to you in the ordinary

course of business, I have drawn none that could lead you to suspect me of gambling."

"No, no," said Mr. Palmer, "the cheques I refer to are those presented by Mrs. Crofton and Mr. Fanshawe. I could only suppose they were to defray your debts of honour."

"Debts of honour!" exclaimed Paul. "I never had one in my life."

At this moment the clerk entered with his banking account. Mr. Palmer, turning to several entries of various amounts, called his attention to them as being sums paid for cheques presented at the bank by Mrs. Crofton or Mr. Fanshawe. The latest was dated a few days back, and was for the amount of £250. Paul's face blanched as he looked at it; and for a minute or two he gazed in silence at the figures.

"Do you say," he uttered at last with a quietness strange to himself, "that Harriet Crofton drew that sum out in my name? Not Harriet Crofton! How could you let her have

it? Is it possible you would loose it without any authority from me?"

"We had your own cheque," was the reply. "Twelve months ago I should have hesitated, Lockley; or communicated with you immediately. But, pardon me, it was only in May you threw away twice that sum on the same worthless woman."

"No, no," said Paul. "I advanced it as a loan to save her husband from threatened imprisonment. This second sum I know nothing about. I never signed a cheque for that amount. Good heavens! Palmer, what is the meaning of it all?"

Mr. Palmer left the room, and returned immediately with a book containing Paul's vouchers. Laying them before him, he pointed out the one he had mentioned, with the sum and signature indisputably in his own handwriting.

Perhaps no more unpleasant shock can be given to a man in monetary transactions than the discovery that some unknown person has

the skill to write his name with every peculiarity and characteristic of his penmanship so accurately copied, that his own discernment is baffled. The characters lying under Paul's scrutiny were so perfectly a fac-simile of his signature, that had they been of any other import he would have acknowledged them at once to be his ; even as it was his mind, baffled and amazed, wandered back through the last few days in a vague search after some abstracted moment in which he could have taken up his pen, and written the words before him. But his memory spoke strongly and clearly ; and Paul covered the paper with his scholarly hand.

“It is not my signature,” he said in a low voice ; “it is a forgery.”

Neither of them spoke for some minutes ; while Paul's thoughts ran rapidly over every circumstance, and every consequence of the crime. It was Harriet who had dealt treacherously with him a second time ; the woman, whom he had forgiven, and admitted back

again into friendly and helpful relations, whose renewed intercourse with him had placed it within her power to strike another blow upon his truthful confidence. He was not greatly surprised ; it was more a feeling of heart-sickness than of indignation that kept him silent, until Mr. Palmer spoke again.

“ I will make some inquiries,” he said ; “ we must be careful about this. But look over the book, and see if there be any other signature you doubt.”

Paul turned over the vouchers, pausing now and then confusedly over signatures he could not identify ; marking here and there a sum which he felt sure the regular expenditure of his household had not required at the date inscribed upon the cheque. The forgeries were several, and for so small an amount at first, that he had passed over one or two at his last balance. But of late the sums had increased boldly ; and the whole amount of doubtful vouchers was nearly 500*l*. Mr. Palmer soon returned, and closing the door

with an anxious and cautious look, drew near to Paul, and carried on his conversation in a low voice.

“It is a grave business,” he said. “From the inquiries I have been able to make, I find that this cheque was presented by Mr. Fanshawe a few days since; it was he who pocketed the money, but Mrs. Crofton was with him at the time. It seems that either Mrs. Crofton or Mrs. John Aspen has generally been with him when he has come to the bank. He opened an account with us last March, and had a cheque-book of his own. Upon one errand or another he has been in pretty frequently, and as I have said, generally with one or both of the Priory ladies with him, or waiting in the carriage at the door. Depend upon it, this is no woman’s work; it is too deftly and cleverly done for an unpractised hand. Do you know anything about this Fanshawe?”

“I know no good of him,” said Paul, as the thought of Doris darted across his mind.

“But whether it be Harriet Crofton or Fanshawe, I must keep it a secret. My hands are tied. You must not mention it to any one.”

He was greatly excited, and waited eagerly to hear his friend's promise. Mr. Palmer looked doubtfully at him as if hesitating to give the required assurance.

“You must be sure,” exclaimed Paul, “that if Harriet Crofton has any complicity in this affair, we would do everything we can to conceal it; we would suffer any loss to shield her from public disgrace. If it be only that scamp, Fanshawe, there may yet be reasons which I cannot now tell you, why I should spare him. I do not know how much power these reasons have; only this I would do; Rufus and I would lose every shilling we possess before we would add a single sorrow to the poor girl whom Rufus loves. I must go and see Doris. For my sake, and the sake of the poor old woman whose age is being stripped of every joy and honour, do

not breathe a word of this matter to any living being."

Having received Mr. Palmer's promise, Paul rode homeward as fast as his horse would carry him, and did not slacken rein until within sight of the Vicarage walls. Upon his way he had come to the decision to cause no alarm at the Priory until he had secured the more guilty culprit in the person of Tom Fanshawe. He had no doubt of Harriet Crofton's complicity; but whatever share she had taken in the impudent robbery, it appeared certain that the actual forgery was the work of Fanshawe, as the clever duplicate of his handwriting seemed beyond the skill of a woman's pen. He could not trust himself in her presence with a secret so weighty, until he could confront her with her accomplice, and so extort a full and final confession from her lips. But he would see Doris. He would frankly entrust the whole miserable story to her. She might know the present residence of Tom Fanshawe, and

give him the information he needed, upon his assurance that he would take no legal measures against him. Or if she communicated the discovery to the criminal in time for him to elude his pursuit, it would only make more simple the rest of his own proceedings. It would then be only a loss of 500*l.* by robbery, added to an equal loss by his foolish advance to Richard Crofton. Ruf's portion was diminishing rapidly.

Paul found Doris alone, for both Mrs. Aspen and Mr. Vale were taking their accustomed repose during the sultry hours of the mid-day. An air of apprehension spread over her face as she saw Paul's agitated appearance; when instead of offering her his hand as usual, he strode away to the window after casting a single glance of concern and sorrow upon her; and there with his face turned from her, looked out upon the lawn as if to gain time and courage for the communication which he had come to impart. Doris felt her heart sink within her. Swiftly anticipating every

misfortune that could befall herself or Mrs. Aspen, she grew every moment more afraid of Paul's news, and less able to bear it.

"Doris," he said at last, coming to her side, and speaking in his most pleasant tones as if to reassure her, "I have a trouble and a loss to bear; but the greatest part of my trouble is that it must also fall upon you. It is mine and yours."

"What is it?" she asked, looking up to him with a smile of relief, for both tones and words gave no intimation of any serious calamity.

"It is about Tom Fanshawe," he answered, dropping his voice almost to a whisper. Doris shivered a little, but she still looked into his face steadily, and spoke with tolerable composure.

"Is he ill?" she asked.

"No, worse; far worse, my poor Doris," replied Paul, gently.

"Not married!" she cried, clasping her hands, and with a face pale with dismay;

“not married, Paul! He never would marry her when he knew she was not the owner of the Priory. It never entered my mind that she could think of such a thing, or I was able to prevent it. He cannot be married, Dr. Lockley.”

“No,” answered Paul, curtly.

“Thank Heaven!” she whispered to herself.

“There are some things which are even worse than marriage,” he continued, with a churlish bitterness in his manner. “I said I had a loss to bear. It is a loss through dishonesty.”

Her eyes were fastened upon him, now with a gleam of keen impatience in them, as if she felt angry at the slow announcement of his ill news; and Paul hurried on through a few explanatory sentences. “I have discovered a forgery upon me,” he said. “Tom Fanshawe and Harriet Crofton presented a cheque upon my bankers no longer ago than the day when I saw him last at Murivance.

It was a forged cheque. I have been robbed of nearly five hundred pounds."

The impatient light faded out of her eyes as he spoke, and her face grew white with terror. She seemed so utterly stricken and prostrated by the intelligence he had so roughly spoken, that Paul, yielding to an imperative impulse, put his arm round her, and drew her to him. She suffered him to lay her head down upon his breast, and murmured, "Oh, Paul! it will kill me!"

So pleasant and rare a sensation was it to him; so tender was the feeling stirring within his heart for the drooping girl, who rested with a kind of quiet despair in his arms, that he uttered no word to break the spell, and scarcely dared to breathe, lest he should recal Doris to her self-consciousness. It returned only too soon, and she freed herself from his encircling and supporting arm, and spoke to him; but with an averted face, and a stammering tone.

"I think," she said, "you would not come

to tell me if you meant to be hard with him. But it seems of no use," and she wrung her hands in deep heart-grief. "He has trusted to your taking no measures against him for my sake; because he believed what all the world believed. Better perhaps to bring his career to an end; and let me hide myself somewhere. I will not say a word to you about sparing him. Do what you think just and right, Dr. Lockley; only let me get away from this place, that I may see and hear nothing about it."

"My dear girl," he answered, soothingly, "I came here on purpose to consult you; not to distress you merely. I see there is not a doubt upon your mind that he is guilty of this crime; I hear it in every word you have spoken. But I told you there was another person implicated in it. If I could overlook the sorrow it must be to you to see him brought to justice, which I could not do, I cannot forget the claim his accomplice has upon me. Do you think I could expose

Harriet Crofton to the disgrace of such a charge? The woman who was once pledged to be my wife! Doris, you must feel how I sympathise with you. There is a lingering tenderness left for the old dream of love; we cannot with our own hands profane the shrine where we once worshipped. They are both shielded; he for the sake of your love, she for the memory of my own."

Very mournfully was the last sentence spoken, and Doris looked up again into his saddened face, as it bent over her. There was an intended comfort in his troubled words, yet they awoke no glad response.

"You loved her very greatly," she answered thoughtfully. "But I ought to thank you; yet it seems so hopeless. This is the second time; and he has done it, because he feels sure you will spare him for my sake. He forged my father's name before; and deprived him of all the money he had saved. What can be done, Dr. Lockley? What steps do you mean to take? He cannot

have spent all that money since the day I was at Thornbury. Surely we could recover a portion of it."

"I wish to bring him back, and confront him with Harriet Crofton," replied Paul. "It is all the punishment I can inflict upon her. I came to you for any information you can give me as to his present residence. As for him, I will exact no more from him than a solemn engagement to leave the country, and go abroad. Even you will be happier, Doris, when your connection with him is completely severed."

"Yes," said Doris, sighing, "if I could be altogether free. Let me go after him; or let me go with you. I can find out whether he has any of the money left; and you would not. The debt will be mine, and I must repay it to you; for he would not have dared to forge your name except that he felt sure you would not prosecute him. I must go with you, Dr. Lockley."

"But, Doris—" began Paul.

“Let me go,” she interrupted with fevered impatience. “Why should I stand upon idle conventionalities, belonging as I do to a dishonoured criminal? Do you suppose I could stay among you all after this, even if you alone knew of it? No; I must go with you to rescue what I can of the stolen money; and then I must leave you. Mrs. Aspen herself will acknowledge and permit it. I could never again lift up my head among you.”

“You shall go,” said Paul.

“We must start at once,” she continued, with energy. “He wrote to me from Leamington last night. He vowed to me that he would not go back there, and yet he went. I will be ready in a few minutes, and we must go by the first train. There is no time to be lost, for he may be gone this very day.” She spoke rapidly, and running to the window called imperiously to a gardener at work near at hand, bidding him hasten over to Fairfield, and order Dr. Lockley’s drag to be brought to the Vicarage with as much expe-

dition as possible. It recalled to Paul's memory Tom Fanshawe's impetuous energy the day he received the intelligence of the dangerous crisis in Doris's illness.

She was back at his side in an instant, and placed her hand in his with mingled timidity and confidence.

"I will be no trouble to you," she said. "When we reach Leamington I shall go to Mrs. John Aspen; and to-morrow we shall come back again, bringing him with us. You will only have to take care of me there. We had better not tell any one of our journey, except Mrs. Aspen. They will all know soon enough."

She left him with rapid steps before he could reply; and reappeared ready for travelling in a short time, followed by a servant carrying a tray which contained some lunch for Paul, to which she helped him in a hurried manner. She had delayed the announcement of their intended journey until the last moment, that she might escape from

Mrs. Aspen's entreaties for a lengthened explanation, and her objections to the course she had resolved upon. Amid all his anxiety and perplexity Paul could not forbear smiling at the simple shrewdness and ready tact with which she carried out her own plans. She was grave and sorrowful ; but there was a deftness and decision about every movement, which appeared to take a large share of the responsibility from his shoulders ; whether she stood at the window listening and watching for the arrival of his drag, or came back to the table urging him to make a good meal, he felt a secret satisfaction in giving up the affair to her management.

At the first sound of the wheels Doris flew upstairs to Mrs. Aspen's chamber. She was half asleep, but roused herself at her entrance, and raised the book which had fallen from her hand. Doris went up to her and kissed her, telling her it was yet early in the afternoon, and not time for her to be disturbed.

“But I am going out with Dr. Lockley,” she added, her colour rising, as she felt the difficulty of the announcement she had to make. “We do not wish any one but you to know. You must trust to us to do what is best. You can trust Paul. We are going to Leamington upon important business. I am obliged to go with him, for it concerns me chiefly.”

“To Leamington!” cried Mrs. Aspen, trembling violently. “Emma! my poor John’s Emma!”

“No, no,” said Doris. “There is nothing whatever the matter with her; and I shall stay with her to-night. We are going to see my only brother.”

“Your brother,” exclaimed Mrs. Aspen, “have you a brother living, Doris? And is he ill, my love? Is Paul going to see him?”

“If I do not see him to-night,” she answered, evasively, “I may perhaps never see him again.”

“Oh, my poor child!” cried the old lady,

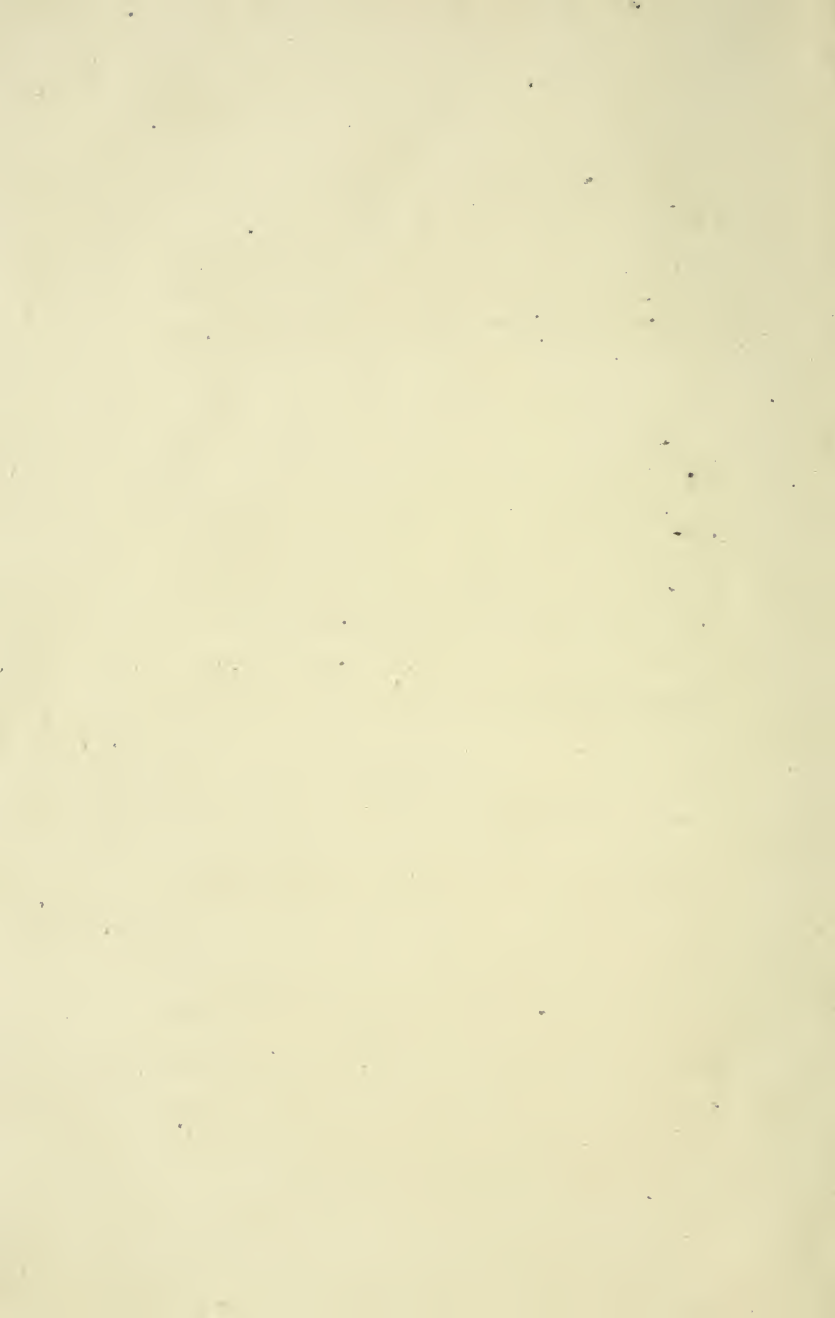
kissing her. "I trust you will be in time! I will pray that you may be in time. God bless you, my dear Doris! Your only brother!"

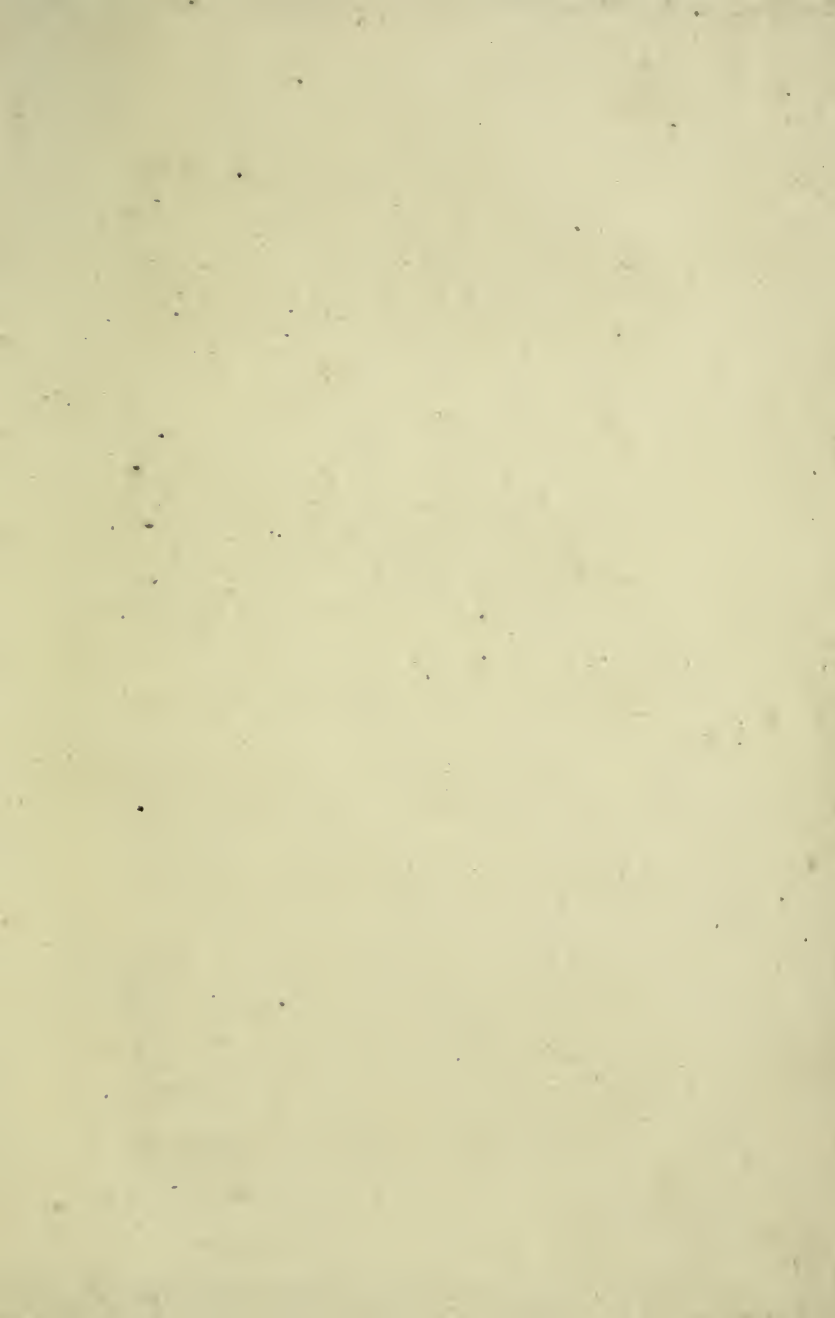
Both the kiss and blessing fell heavily upon Doris's stricken spirit. The quiet dwelling-place was so full of peace and repose; there was so much love and fondness in the aged friend whom she was leaving; that she felt as if about to exile herself from the last shelter which protected her from the pitiless world. She could never return to the esteem and trust she had enjoyed there. Within these walls, and in the sad hearts of those who had received her most cordially to their confidence, a stigma would rest upon her name; though she might not be compelled to bear the brand publicly. She sat beside Paul, speechless and deaf to his occasional remarks, until they reached the station at Thornbury. There he placed her in a carriage, and taking a seat beside her, that she might feel that his gaze could not fall

upon her, he left her undisturbed to her own melancholy thoughts. Absorbed in meditations scarcely less sorrowful, the hours of their journey passed slowly in almost unbroken silence.

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:
BRADBURY, EVANS, AND CO., PRINTERS. WHITEFRIARS.





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 054664559

